

Somalia

Population: 7.3 million¹

Life expectancy: 46 years

National capital: Mogadishu

Independence from UK (North) and from Italy (South): 1 July 1960



Abstract

Somalia became dictatorial in 1969, and lost its central government and administration in 1991. Conflict in Somalia takes place between powerful elite groups motivated by the interest of gaining control over assets of economic value (land, ports, roads). The elites mobilize clan families, clans, and sub-clans, which are divided by a long history and objective conditions of pastoral production. The magnitude of the conflict has been expanded by the economic/climatic conditions, which increase the vulnerability of people and make them easy to mobilize: the threshold of violence in Somalia is extremely low. The international effort to solve the Somali conflict has largely been unsuccessful due to the weaknesses of the integration between economic and political/security approaches (UN operations). At the same time conflict-settlement capacity building has been successful on local levels especially in the northeastern areas of Somalia (Puntland).

¹ Unreliable estimate.

The Complex Humanitarian Emergency in the Former Somalia

Timo Kivimäki & Juha Auvinen

Somalia's civil war has its roots deep in history. However, the new escalation of clan-based antagonism started after the Ogaden War (1977-78) and a coup attempt by the Majerteen clan and the *Somali Salvation Democratic Front* against President Siyad Barre. Fighting in the northern parts of Somalia escalated at the end of the 1980s. In 1988 government troops bombed Hargeisa, destroying the city. Furthermore, Ogadeni clan militias loyal to the government were ordered and armed by the government to attack the civilian Issaq clan population (Lyons and Samatar 1995). Estimates of civilian deaths range from 50,000 to 60,000. The fighting led to a flow of refugees into Ethiopia. By late 1988, the UNHCR was providing aid to 846,000 refugees in over 40 camps throughout Somalia (Auvinen & Kivimäki, 2000).

Fighting escalated towards the south where the *United Somali Congress*, the *Somali National Movement* and the *Somali Patriotic Movement*, in a popular uprising, overthrew the government of Siyad Barre in January 1991. The country has ever since lacked a national government. After the collapse of the Barre regime, the Somali National Movement took over the north in February 1991 and proclaimed the old British Somaliland an independent Somaliland Republic. Despite violent protests, an exodus of non-Issaq people, a lack of international recognition, and initial hostilities with groups supported by Aidid, some form of stability, even if not democratic stability, has been reached in north Somalia. The Somali Salvation Democratic Front established control, and a degree of stability, in the northeast and some of the central regions. This area, later called the Republic of Puntland,² also became stable enough to attract foreign aid.

² This territory has also declared itself independent, but has not received any international recognition.

The most violent clashes have been concentrated in southern Somalia. Also the development of regional structures of administration has been less successful in the south than in the north (*Africa Confidential* 39:25, 18.12. 1998, 7). In Mogadishu, fighting has continued among the groups in the rebel alliance, the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), the United Somali Congress (USC), the Somali National Movement (SNM), and later inside the United Somali Congress, with tens of thousands of casualties and almost a million refugees inside and outside Somalia. Ali Mahdi Mohamed (USC, Abgal clan) gained control and still rules northern Mogadishu, while the other faction (USC, Habr Gidir clan), headed by General Mohamed Farah Aidid (and later his son Hussein Mohamed Farah Aidid), established control over southern Mogadishu and parts of central Somalia. About 500,000 people were left without basic services (Sahnoun 1994, 11). In the fighting over Kismayo (Aidid-Omer Jess alliance against Mohamed Hersi Morgan's group) 100,000 refugees fled to Kenya. The famine reached its peak in the Bay region and adjoining areas in June-October 1992. The number of dead is unknown but de Waal (1994, 142) estimates that it is over 200,000. This number has continued to increase, but at a much slower pace.

The modernization of agriculture in search of increased productivity contributed to the gravity of the conflict as food production became more utility-maximizing and less secure (concentration caused climatic vulnerabilities). Food production also became more technology/capital intensive and thus more vulnerable to the destruction of war (Besteman & Cassanelli 1996: 201-202). Famine hit the areas responsible for the entire country's agricultural production, claiming altogether more than 500,000 lives. On the international level the failures in the UN-led peace enforcement operation have contributed to the growth of scepticism towards international military intervention to bring and maintain peace. At the same time military operations by private foreign armies have gained momentum. Furthermore the conflict in Somalia has caused a certain amount of escalation in regional tensions, first in the modest form of competition between Kenya and Ethiopia for a role in the peace process. Later, in 1999, the war between Hussein Aidid's Somali National Alliance (trained and armed by Eritrea) and the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (armed by Ethiopia) became yet another theater of

hostilities in the war between Ethiopian and Eritrea (IRIN 1999). The future of Somalia seems gloomy not only because it is becoming a theater for regional conflict, but also because there is expected to be a significant resurgence of famine (IRIN 1999, see also Human Development Report Somalia 1998).

Agents

Conflicts and violence have taken place primarily between rival elite groups of the new Somali bourgeoisie class (Samatar 1987).³ The questions of representation and leadership of groups have been in dispute especially after the fall of President Siyad Barre. This is well reflected in the fact that the majority of the casualties have occurred as a result of the fighting between the two factions of United Somali Congress. In one of the coordinating meetings for humanitarian assistance in Somalia (after the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, late 1993), the 15 groups participating included four different Somali National Alliances, and three other groups were also represented by at least two delegations. In the first and second EU Seminar on Decentralized Political Structures for Somalia (Lake Naivasha & Lake Nakuru, Kenya) the participants did not represent any political group partly because of the difficulty of identifying legitimate representatives. Furthermore, the clan associations of different elite groups are generally disputed.

Clan identities were used by the elite groups to mobilize support for their own egoistic interests. Yet clan divisions and antagonism have their origins in the most ancient history of the Somali people (Samatar 1982; Lewis 1981/93, 1975; 1964). Pastoral production, the main source of livelihood in Somalia, has required cooperation, primarily within families, in everyday routines. Therefore, lineage and clan groups have become important for Somali individuals, and political identity and loyalty have been determined by genealogical proximity and remoteness (Lewis 1981/93). Since a larger form of organization was not necessary, and in fact, the gathering together of larger groups of pastoralists was harmful for grazing, clans have become oppositional units that can be

³ Or “middle class” as Abucar (1995, 13) calls it.

mobilized in contest situations (Lewis 1975). Furthermore, colonial and dictatorial strategies to divide-and-rule as well as war-related mobilization have strengthened these traditional divisions.

Parties to the Conflict in Somalia

Name & Acronym	Established/intensified violent action	Represents	Support	Conflict with
Siyad Barre's Republic of Somalia, SNF Somali National Front (after Barre's fall).	Republic established in 1960, Barre's power through coup, 1969.	In the 1970s Ogaden, Marehan and Darood clans, later only Marehan.	1969-78, SU, 1978-90 US.	All other groups that existed before the collapse of the govt.
SDM, Somali Democratic Movement, later called Rahanweyn Resistance Army	1990	Rahanweyn.	Late 1990s Ethiopia.	In Kismayo 1990-, against USC-Aidid and SPM. Inter-riverine area.
SNM, Somali National Movement	1981	From 1991, people of Somaliland. In reality Issaq.	Ethiopian govt in 1980s.	Barre, who supported the Ogadeni against the SNM. Also Barre in Mogad, with USC & SPM. Later ag. USC.
SPM, Somali Patriotic Movement	1989-90, Ag Barre in alliance with USC in Mogadishu, 1990 ag USC, Ali Mahdi.	Ogaden. Later two factions Marehan (Morgan) and Ogaden (Omer Jess, allied with Aidid)	Morgan by Belgian troops?	Barre 1989-90, Ogaden faction against SDM& USC, Aidid in Kismayo 1991-, Marehan faction ag. Aidid&Ogaden faction.
SSDF, Somali Salvation Democratic Front.	1978, after the Ogaden war, after a failed anti-Barre coup.	Majerteen.	Ethiopian & Libyan govts in 1980s	Against Barre in the north. Controlling Northeast Somalia, Bossaso.
USC, United Somali Congress	1988, as a Movement allied with SPM ag Barre government.	Hawiye clan family. Divided between the clan of Abgal (Ali Mahdi) and Habr Gidir (Hussein Aidid).		Against Barre -1990, Aided-faction ag Ali Mahdi (Manifesto group) faction 1991-(93), In Kismayo ag SDM, with SPM (Ogaden).
Somalia Salvation Alliance	1993 Before the Sodere Conference as an anti-Aidid alliance.	Strong Abgal (Hawiye) influence. Ali Mahdi's militia.	Israel?	Against Aidid, against Jess.
United Somali Congress-Somali National Alliance.	1993 as an alliance between Aidid's USC and anti-Somaliland Issaq & Ogaden.	Hawiye (Habs Gidir), Ogaden, Issaq. Aidid's Habr Gidir militia also split along sub-clan lines; Rer Hilowle/Saad (Osman Ali Ato) and Hussan Aidid's Rer Jalaf /Saad Control over south Mogadishu, road to Baidoa, Merka, North Kismayu (1999)	Russia? Libya? Iran? 1999: Eritrea.	Ali Mahdi and SPM (especially Morgan faction), SDM in Kismayo. Ag the UN.

Motivations

Opportunities rather than grievances lay at the heart of the ruling elite's motivations, while the decline of pastoralism due to environmental degradation and the resulting uncontrolled urbanization were at the heart of grassroots motivations (Auvinen & Kivimäki 1997). In addition to poverty partly caused by the military spending by the dictatorial government of President Siyad Barre, and the conflict tradition contributed to the low conflict threshold.⁴

Battles raged over control of economically important territories: roads, ports, farming land and water, reflecting the acquisitive, gainful, motivations of political elites. During the famine, food and protection money became the prime stimulating forces. The long-term objective of each military leader was to emerge from the conflict as a winner. In order to obtain control of state institutions and thereby gain control over the distribution of lucrative economic resources. As Mogadishu was a key to achieving this end it is no surprise that the fiercest battles were fought over its control (Auvinen & Kivimäki, forthcoming).

Due to the absence of democracy under Barre's rule, non-violent means of expression of grievances and non-violent forms of competition were unavailable. Due to the conflict and the collapse of political order this lack became ever more permanent. All international (especially by the EU and the UN) and regional (especially by the IGAD, Ethiopia, and Kenya) efforts to resolve national disputes were unsuccessful, partly because of the inability of parties and peace conferences to define who represents whom. Ideological differences or constitutional conflicts of opinions were rather negligible, and thus the real problems were more basic than those explicitly dealt with in the peace

⁴ According to Markakis (1987, 16) "claims over pasture and water were the perennial bone of contention among lineage groups and clans. Force was the only effective means to secure such claims and it was a constant factor of nomadic life." Among some groups homicide was a cultural practice, a prerequisite for attaining adult status and contracting marriage, and provided added motivation for raiding (Markakis 1987, 34).

conferences. The questions of representation and that of the future unit of political administration were the most difficult ones.

Difficulties also arose at the beginning due to the fact that all the initiatives proposed as a result of domestic, regional, and international facilitation of national dispute resolution were based on the modern concept of territorial, state-centric political administration. These solutions were fundamentally in contradiction to the non-territorial anti-state culture of Somali pastoral culture. Furthermore, the initial international and regional efforts to resolve the national dispute were not integrated with the effort to address the root causes of the conflict. On the contrary, the international effort was completely insensitive in its humanitarian effort in terms of the effects that aid would have on conflict motivations: humanitarian aid was seen as completely apolitical and lacking any conflict implications (Auvinen & Kivimäki 1997). Finally, the international efforts to solve the national dispute have been accused of being a power play. It seems clear that Kenya and Ethiopia have supported two slightly competitive peace projects, with the EU seeming to have been more interested in the Kenya process (*Africa Confidential*, 17 January 1997, 2-4).

Later, the grassroots approach, especially in the North Eastern parts of Somalia, has succeeded in integrating development needs with security, understanding the need to approach security and development from a more culturally sensitive, smaller scale perspective. In 1993 donor agencies established the Somalia Aid Coordination body (SACB), and in 1994 the UN agencies established the UN Coordination Team (UNCT). This group started to implement measures aimed at longer-term alleviation of the economic root causes of conflict at a local grassroots level. This effort has been very well coordinated and has also been able to contribute to progress on local-level dispute resolution. At times, however, it has been very much challenged by the difficulty of supporting local social capital and local capacities for peace building without corrupting it (by making it less local; Wiebe, Meshak & Ahmed 1995; Helander, Mukthar & Lewis 1995). Also, the Swedish contribution in this respect is worth noting. In 1992 the Special Representative of the UNSG, Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, asked the Swedish

government for assistance in developing an appropriate approach to the conflict in Somalia. The Swedish government contracted with the Life & Peace Institute, which was at times able to find solutions by using conflict transformation at a grassroots level (Heinrich 1997).

Instruments

Different groups, including the state, utilized the tradition of hostility between clans as a means of mobilization. Furthermore, Barre's regime skilfully used the means of the state in mobilization. Economic incentives were also very much utilized, which made it very difficult for donor agencies to avoid assisting violent mobilization by giving aid.

At the beginning, the regime was in a militarily superior position, having received ample assistance from abroad. It was also in a position to direct state resources to its favoured constituencies. This monopoly was lost when state institutions and the economy collapsed. Most of the regime's military arsenal was captured by the opposition's military factions and groups that President Siyad Barre used as proxies against the rebel groups. During the course of fighting, opposition groups procured military means from abroad, fueling the violence inside Somalia. The role of regional neighbors in the arming of parties to the Somali conflict started to increase sharply only in 1998-1999. The hesitation to interfere, which was typical of the Cold War era, finally disappeared as "African World War I" started in the Congo, and especially as the traditional party to Somali affairs, Ethiopia, started a war against Eritrea. This war gave a political motive for Eritrea to train and arm those militias (especially Hussein Aidid), which fought against forces supported by Ethiopia (SNM & SDM) (IRIN 1999).

The international effort to disarm Somali groups has often been criticized for having at the same time, both too broad (with a hidden agenda broadening the objectives) and too narrow a military focus. On the one hand, the international effort, while concentrating on humanitarian assistance and the containment of a conflict which was rendering such assistance impossible, forgot to address, in time, the root causes of frustration in Somalia.

At the same time, the international peace effort, and especially the role played by the US, has been criticized for its partiality. Finally, the international military effort did not take sufficiently into account the political implications of its actions in the battlefield, which resulted in a loss of neutrality and legitimacy in the eyes of warring factions, eventually leading to diminished operational capacity and an early withdrawal from the war-torn Somalia.

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Chronology

- **1960:** Somalia gains independence (South Somalis formerly a colony of Italy; North Somalis (Somaliland) formerly a colony of the UK).
- **1969:** Coup by Siyad Barre.
- **1977-78:** Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia over the Somali inhabited province of Ethiopia. SSDF coup attempt against President Siyad Barre, beginning of a brutal repression of Majerteen and Issaq of the North by government troops and their Ogadeni proxies, mobilization of clan divisions for Barre's divide-and-rule program.
- **1988:** Bombing of Hergeisa. Intensification of fighting, spreading of violence to the south.
- **January 1991:** USC, SNM, and SPM overthrow the government of Siyad Barre.
- **February 1991:** Somali National Movement takes over the north in February 1991 and proclaims the old British Somaliland an independent Somaliland Republic. Collapse of the anti-Barre coalition USC, SNM, and the unity of the USC.
- **June-July 1991:** The Djibouti government, supported by Egypt, Italy, and other regional states, hosts two peace conferences in June and July 1991. Failure, as Aidid refuses to participate as long as Ali Mahdi still claims to be interim president, whereas the SNM refuses because of the alleged independence of Somaliland.
- **January 1992:** Security Council invokes Chapter VII of the UN Charter and imposes an arms embargo, finding a threat to international peace based on predominantly internal conditions.
- **February & March 1992:** UN sponsored cease-fire documents by Ali Mahdi and Aidid, reduction of heavy artillery shelling.
- **April 1992:** Security Council approves the establishment of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM, later labeled as UNOSOM I). Boutros-Ghali appoints Ambassador Mohammed Sahnoun of Algeria the Secretary General's special representative to Somalia.

- **September 1992:** UNOSOM's 500 armed troops. The United States insists that it is purely a "humanitarian" operation, not a peace-keeping one.
- **August 1992:** Launching of a massive emergency airlift of food, "Operation Provide Relief" by the US.
- **October 1992:** UNSG special representative for Somalia, Sahnoun succeeds in getting the assent of all faction leaders of the different regions and community elders to attend a national conference on the decentralization of Somalia. Due to UN disagreement the plan fails, Sahnoun resigns.
- **Nov-Dec 1992:** President Bush offers U.S. troops to lead a UN action, Security Council approves humanitarian intervention in Somalia. The launching of the United Task Force (UNITAF) "Operation Restore Hope".
- **January 1993:** National Reconciliation Conference under the auspices of the UN, representatives of 14 Somali factions signs an agreement in Addis Ababa declaring a cease-fire. Follow-up conference in March calls for a Transitional National Council (TNC), with a formula for transitional authority and rotating presidency. Aidid's withdrawal and the deterioration of the security situation causes a failure of the plan.
- **May 1993:** The United States-lead UNITAF and UNOSOM I replaced by UNOSOM II, a more international force whose mandate explicitly includes disarmament, the establishment of a police force, and national reconciliation.
- **September 1993:** Clinton's decision to withdraw U.S. troops by the end of March 1994.
- **December 1993:** Establishment of the SACB to coordinate donors to Somalia.
- **October 1994:** Establishment of UNCT for Somalia to coordinate UN agencies in Somalia.
- **November 1994:** Security Council decides to terminate UNISOM II
- **March 1995:** Last UN peace-keeping personnel are withdrawn from Somalia.
- **January 1997:** Leaders of 26 Somali factions create a clan/faction-based, balanced 41-member National Salvation Council headed by an eleven-person National Executive Committee, with a mandate to organize a transitional government. Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea support it. Aidid does not.
- **January-February 1999:** Regional escalation: shipments of arms and training to Hussein Aidid from Eritrea against the Ethiopian-supported Rahanweyn Resistance Army.
- **March 1999:** Escalation of violence in Mogadishu.