

SOMALIA

THE END OF A NATION STATE

Without
Water
or Oil
—Shirley Blair



The
Saudi
Connection
—Ibrahim
Fofanah

OCTOBER 1992

Vol. 2, No. 6

USA Africa

\$3.00

UDC:

Serving

The

African

And

American

Educational

Needs

AFRICA NOT
READY FOR
HIGH TECH

—La Melle



ALGERIA AD10 ANGOLA KW 70 BOTSWANA \$2.00 CANADA C\$2.00 CFA ZONE CFA 800 EG/PT \$51.30 THE GAMBIA D4 UNITED KINGDOM 75p
USA \$2.00 WEST GERMANY DM3.50 ETHIOPIA EPR KRW 200 NIGERIA N170 MALI CFA 800

SOMALI: The End of a Nation State

The Republic of Somalia, was created in 1960 when the British Somaliland and former Italian Somaliland merged on the eve of independence. After 1960 under the new political leadership, the "Greater Somali" goal became the pre-eminent national agenda. Tragically, it was this national obsession of liberating the Somali lost territories at the expense of everything else that contributed to the actual demise of the very existence of the Somali state. The new political order established in the post colonial Africa with respect to the question of unifying those people and territories partitioned during the European scramble for Africa was sealed by the Organization of African Unity. The OAU adopted the colonial boundaries as legitimate demarcation for the newly independent African states. Utilizing OAU's principles of "territorial integrity" and "non-interference" in the "internal affairs" of a member state, Somalia's neighbors, Ethiopia and Kenya, rebuffed every attempt made by Somalia on its claims to the territories within their respective states. In particular, the 1977-78 invasion of Ethiopia by General Muhammad Siad Barre to liberate and incorporate the Ogaden into the state of Somalia, turned out to be a political miscalculation of colossal proportion. The economic hardship which Somalia suffered as a result of the war was enormous. Consequently, Somalia suffered from national psychic injury resulting in the loss of the Somali national soul.

Later, Somalia became a pawn in the new international political order which emerged during the post world war era. The two super powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, with their respective allies became attracted to the Horn of Africa for its strategic significance. The two enemy states, Ethiopia and Somalia allied with the opposing super powers, the former with the U.S. from the 1950's to 1977 and the latter with USSR, particularly from 1969-77. Both the U.S. and the USSR changed sides during the 1977-78 Ethio-Somali conflict in which the USSR and its allies poured over 10 million dollars of assistance into Ethiopia. Propping up dictators was common practice within the political games of the super power rivalry. The super power political machinations with respect to supporting reckless dictators, was no exception in the Horn of Africa. These dictators survived on their allegiance to the political goals of a super power at a given time rather than on the needs and wishes of the people. In the case of Somalia, it was General Muhammad Siad Barre (a member of the Mareehaan clan), having captured the seat of power in Somalia in October 1969, who became the beneficiary of the super power politics in the Horn. Between 1969-76, he put Somalia on the USSR side. He became a populist politician, preaching socialism and denouncing America. The discontent, as a result of his defeat in the 1977-78 war and the refugee crisis arising from the combination of the drought which struck the entire region, threatened the Siad Barre's regime. Both his opponents and his own responses to their attacks took on increasingly more clan-oriented activities. The leaders of the Majeerteen, Hawiye and Isaaq (these clans supplied both presidents and all three prime ministers during the year of the civilian governments), began complaining about the relative neglect they had experienced under Siad Barre. The president in turn began mistrusting them. He began surrounding himself with people from three main clans with whom he had special affiliation, namely: Mareehan (his own clan), Ogaadeen (his mother's clan) and Dulbahante (son-in-law's clan). Subsequently, organized clan-based political movements emerged in opposition to Siad Barre's regime. The Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) which primarily was organized by the military leaders who survived Siad Barre's reprisal for their involvement in the April 1978 foiled coup, and the disgruntled elite of the Majeerteen clan, became the first organization to oppose Siad Barre's rule. The Somali National Movement (SNM) founded in April 1981 by some Isaaq emigres in London were second. Henceforth, the

Somali national politics degenerated to inter-clan animosity, leading to anarchy, loss of thousands of lives and enormous material destruction. There was no boundary, shame nor logic employed by the opposition in its resolution to dismantle Siad Barre's regime. Both SDF and SNM were supported by an unlikely source, Ethiopia, the very state which still controlled the Ogadeen over which both Somalia and Ethiopia fought. Indeed, in Ethiopia, the regime of Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam lost no time in its intention to weaken the Somali state by using the opposition against Siad Barre. With generous support from the Addis Ababa regime, the opposition began attacking inside Somalia. In August 1982, the Ethiopian regular army joined the Barre's opponents and invaded Somalia and occupied two towns, Galdogub and Balmabale. Siad Barre, in turn, escalated attacks against his opponents targeting the northern cities such as Buraro and Hargeisa. Casualties were staggering. For example, "Africa Watch" reported that the Siad Barre regime "had killed as many as 50,000 unarmed civilians between June 1988 and January 1990," and over 400,000 people fled to Ethiopia as refugees.

THE FALL OF SIAD BARRE

What precipitated the sudden fall of Siad Barre was the end of the Cold War. Somalia was strategically irrelevant to the East-West politics. Thus, in 1988, the U.S. Congress, concerned with human rights violations in Somalia and having determined that Somalia was expendable, blocked aid to Somalia. In the meantime, the opposition also began building a coalition against the weakened regime. The United Somali Congress (USC) was organized by Abi Mohammed "Wardigly" in January 1989. He served as vice-president of SNM from 1984-1987 but was allegedly removed from that post, mainly due to the fact that he was from another clan—Hawiye. The USC was supported by the Hawiye clan. This was the first time the Hawiyes, the largest clan in Somalia, were ready to join the opposition. By this time, it was clear that Barre was rejected by most of the clans and the larger Somali society, as well as by the most significant world powers.

In May 1990, a Somali group of 114 distinguished citizens known as the Manifesto Group issued a manifesto to resolve the political crisis in Somalia. The key recommendations in the document were for Barre to resign and allow the creation of a caretaker government, the abrogation of repressive laws, and the immediate call for the National Reconciliation and Salvation Conference which would prepare the nation for elections. Instead of jumping to this offer by the Manifesto Group as a face saving opportunity, Barre arrested some of them. Consequently, members of the Manifesto Group were to become the actors in bringing down the 21-year-old regime of Siad Barre. The Manifesto group formed the executive committee under USC around Mogadishu. The final round of battle to topple Siad Barre commenced in December 1990. The Somali Patriotic Movement joined USC and forced out President Siad Barre on January 27, 1991. He eventually managed to escape with the assistance of his soldiers to Garbaharre, his hometown nearly 300 Km north-west of Mogadishu.

The USC, the chief opposition in the Barre government, appointed Ali Mahadi as the interim-president and Omar Arteh Ghalib, as Isaaq as the foreign minister. The new government proposed a three-point program to deal with the political crisis: (a) A broad-based government of national reconciliation involving representatives from all groups in or outside of the country; (b) The establishment of a multi-party system; and (c) The formation of a consultative body, a council of elders, for the purpose of drafting a new constitution and the facilitation of national reconciliation in some traditional fashion. The interim-president also called for a national conference to be convened in February 1992.

The Demise of the Somali State



*by Hamdesa Tusso, Ph.D., Institute of Conflict Studies
George Mason University, Virginia*

Rakiya Omaar, Somali national, the executive director "Africa Watch," in her recent article entitled, "Somalia: At War With Itself," wrote, "Nineteen ninety-one is the year Somalia died." Mr. James Jonas, UN envoy, upon returning from a visit to Somalia reported, "In Somalia today, you cannot really talk of an organized civil society." By all accounts today, there is no central authority to keep law and order and bring a halt to the rampant violence. Virtually every aspect of the state system has been destroyed; there is no central government with the authority and capacity to collect taxes and raise revenue for the purpose of providing services the people so desperately need. About 800,000 Somalis have fled to the neighboring countries, Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen, etc., as refugees. Currently, it is estimated that thousands of people perish daily due to starvation. It is, in fact, estimated that one-third of Somali population (estimated to be 6 million) may starve to death. Food and medicine donated by the international community cannot reach the victims of famine and civil war due to lack of security.

The current social crisis in Somalia raises a critical question. Why Somalia? After all, Somalia, unlike so many other African states, has been endowed with certain natural attributes which are presumed essential for smooth governance of a modern state. Unlike most other African states which were carved out of a plethora of ethnic groups, the Somali population is homogeneous; all speak one mother tongue, Somali. The majority of Somalis adhere to Islam; they all share a common culture and colonial experience and by all accounts there has been less social stratifications. They all ascribe to some notion of a 'pastoral ethic of clan socialism.' Thus, it is safe to state that the glaring failure in the case of the Somalia state shatters the basic assumptions held by theoreticians, politicians and policy makers closely associated with the administration of a modern nation state; that is, homogeneity of a population.

In explaining the reasons for the collapse of the Somali state, two cultural traditions which are strikingly African may help. The clan-based politics and the reverence for the traditional elders. Viewing the cultural values of clan system and traditional elders on their own merits should be a source of pride and encouragement to every African. Indeed, they attest to the quality and strength of the African culture. These two traditional systems survived the European colonial administration. They survived Islam as well as the modern African state. However, the severe limitations of relying on clan-based politics becomes glaringly evident when such strategy is put against the harsh realities of a modern world. We live in a global village. No society can survive on its own in the contemporary world. The global economy and political systems are integrated, the natural resources are dwindling in the face of population explosion. Africa has the highest birth rate; this:

includes population growth in Somalia. All these factors make the competition for survival and success, both at individual and societal levels, very intense and demanding.

The significance of the politics of clan mobilization in the modern Somali social system is not readily apparent to an outsider. As an Oromo and as someone who was raised in a clan-based society, I have direct experience with the notion of clanship. Indeed, the Oromos and the Somalis, as the two largest cultural units belonging to the larger Cushitic cultural groupings, share some common cultural threads including the clan-based social order. Also, I have had the privilege of interacting with Somali political activities and scholars during the last 10 years. Indeed, I have read and heard Somalis decry President Siad Barre's corrupt regime. The criticisms are usually against his clan-based reward system, depriving the government and, indeed, the nation the opportunity to utilize national talents and, furthermore, creating division within the society. However, I gained a glimpse of the issue in some meaningful way, pertaining to the clan factor, in Somali politics in 1990 at a conference on the Horn of Africa organized by the prestigious Institute for Life and Peace, Upassala, Sweden. The issue of clan-based politics in Somalia came up in a colloquy between the representatives of the opposition movements, the representatives of the Siad Barre regime, including the Somali Ambassador in Sweden, and some Somali intellectuals. Unlike other participants (i.e., those from Ethiopia and Sudan), the opposition movements (through their representatives at the conference) had a common position for the resolution of the conflicts in Somalia—The immediate departure of Siad Barre and the restoration of democracy. Then came the most revealing question: "If you sincerely believe that Siad Barre is the villain, why then don't you have a national approach in your opposition?" The question was raised by Professor Siad Samatar, Somali intellectual. The opposition movements in the audience muttered and somehow indicated that they believed in a united and democratic Somalia. "Why are you all here representing clan-based political organizations instead of forming a national political organization," pressed Professor Samatar. To this question, there was no response from the representatives of the opposition movements. The relevance of this question proved critical later on as the world witnessed the Somali state commit suicide following the ouster of Barre.

The opposition failed to consider the potential danger of anchoring programs and strategies to seek state power solely on clan and sub-clan mobilization rather than developing political programs which can transcend all sectors of the society and seeking nationwide support for them! The troubles endemic to clan mobilization in Somali politics began manifesting themselves from day one when Ali Mahdi Mohamed was appointed as the interim president, without consultation with other opposition movements. Ali Mahdi was a wealthy businessman who had been a parliamentarian in civilian governments before Siad took power in 1969 and was a prominent member of the Manifesto Group and later became a USC Executive Committee member. Mahdi provided financial backing for the new guerilla group responsible for inflicting the final blow on Siad Barre. The SNM leadership questioned the appointment

of Ali Mahdi and immediately proceeded to work on the creation of an autonomous administration for northern Somalia, a process which eventually led to the creation of the Republic of Somaliland, culminating in the unilateral declaration of independence on August 18, 1991.

The government of Ali Mahadi was also rejected by a faction within USC led by General Moham Fara Aideed. At this stage of the civil war, struggle for political power deteriorated to clan rivalry. Both Mahdi and Aideed belong to the same USC and the same clan, Haiwe. However, they belong to different sub-clans. Ali Mahadi is from the Abgal sub-clan and Aideed belongs to the Habr Gic sub-clan. It is this confrontation between these two warlords which plunged Southern Somalia, particularly around Mogadishu, into the current horrific human tragedy. Since neither warlord had distinct military superiority over the other, both men used the civilian population causing tremendous casualties. It is estimated that between November 1991 and February 1992 about 14,000 people had been killed and thousands more had been wounded and more have been displaced as a result of this confrontation between these ambitious individuals. The rest of the South is equally afflicted with strife as the result of rivalry and clashes between various clan and sub-clan organizations and warlords.

Poverty of Political Leadership

The recent political conflicts which have slid the Somali society into the "Dark Ages" can be repeated in many other states in Africa. Africa was integrated into a global economic and political system without any meaningful preparation to compete and procure political and economic benefits for the African masses from the interaction with the European world. Thus Europe came to Africa on its own terms and colonized and dominated the African economic, cultural and political life. There was no educated leadership to comprehend the implications of the European intentions in Africa. The African traditional leadership was no match to the masters of the new political order. In fact, they, in many instances, fell prey to the manipulation before them by the colonial master selling their own African brothers and sisters as slaves for menial profits, representing the legacy of corruption and betrayal of the African masses by the traditional elite.

Africa's decolonization in the '60's took place across the continent with such rapidity that one wonders how and why the tiny European elite were able to rule masses of the entire continent for many centuries. The African masses did not benefit from modern education and economic development which would have enabled them to transform traditional democratic ideals and practices into modern state-based governance. The very few who have had the privilege of schooling in modern educational systems and acquired access to the center of powers in the contemporary world also betrayed the larger interest of the African masses.

Indeed, the political behavior of African elite during the post-independence era has a lot in common. Whether they were elected or rose to the pinnacle of state power via the coup, they all, perhaps with a few exceptions, favored one party system, wanted to be life

presidents, were autocratic, intolerant toward political opposition and employed repressive measures in dealing with political dissidents; they all utilized ethnic clan solidarity as political base, were involved in favoritism and nepotism with respect to a government reward system, and they were all engaged, in corruption, diverting public resources for personal benefits.

The political behavior of General Mohamad Siad Barre of Somalia epitomizes these characteristics. He was neither capable of providing necessary leadership, particularly after the defeat of the 1977-78 Ogaden war, nor was he willing to allow the emergence of a new political leadership to prepare the society to confront a new era—the post-cold war political order. Furthermore, his own reckless political machinations, which pitted one clan against another, led to the eventual evaporation of goodwill within the society and finally causing the loss of confidence in the Pan-Somali national cause. The Somalis seem to have lost faith in the Somali national party entity as a viable proposition. In fact, the entire Somali political leadership of the post-independence era did neither exhibit the strategic imagination nor the necessary political will to exploit the natural material and political assets available to Somalia in their pursuance of recovering the Ogaden from the Ethiopian Empire. Somalia, as an internationally recognized state, had more power and influence at its disposal to pursue this goal than the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) had to actualize the liberation of Eritrea. EPLF, for example, made a strategic decision in its pursuit of liberating Eritrea. It supported the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) with the clear intent of using it to dismantle the Amhara-dominated regime of Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam and replacing it with Tigray-dominated government which was expected to be more hospitable toward Eritrean interests. First, by supporting the Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a Tigrean-dominated organization, it was able to create a political environment in Addis Ababa which is supportive of Eritrean independence via an internationally supervised referendum, scheduled to take place less than two years from now. Secondly, by supporting the TPLF-armed struggle early on, it managed to keep the Ethiopian army engaged in Tigray, thus shifting the battleground away from Eritrea itself. Thirdly, by engineering the destruction of the Ethiopian military power, which was the largest army in Black Africa, and at the same time, keeping the new Meles Zenawi regime dependent on Eritrea, EPLF has emerged as the most organized and disciplined military might in the region. It is ironic that EPLF, a political organization without even a recognized state at present time, has offered to send a military unit to keep law in Somalia. It would be recalled that EPLF received financial and diplomatic support from Somalia during the Siad Barre administration. ■