



JULY 2023

Somalia: A Failed State?

Authored by: Harshita Mahajan

Edited by: D Sakshi

About the Author

Harshita Mahajan is a postgraduate student at the Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) and a Research Assistant at the Centre for Security Studies, JSIA.

About the Centre for Security Studies

The Centre for Security Studies (CSS) was established in 2020 as the Jindal School of International Affairs' first student-run research centre under the aegis of Prof Dr Pankaj K Jha. Researchers at CSS – through in-depth analysis briefs and events, reports, policy briefs and print publications – explore both regional and thematic topics in the broader field of international security studies. The concept of international security has been expanded to reflect not merely the study of state security, but also include topics like ethnic, sectarian and religious conflict; civil wars and state failure; cyber and space warfare; resource-related security issues; the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; defence economics and the role of ethics or morality in the formulation of security policies. The complexity of these matters is what the Centre for Security Studies attempts to unfold. Please refer to www.cssjsia.com for further details, and follow the Centre's social media platforms for critical news and research updates:



www.linkedin.com/company/jindal-centre-for-security-studies/



www.instagram.com/css_jsia/



https://twitter.com/Css_Jsia

Get in touch with us through email: css@jgu.edu.in

Important disclaimer

All views expressed in this publication belong to the author and do not reflect the opinions or positions of the Centre for Security Studies. While researchers and editors at CSS strive towards innovation, CSS as an organisation does not take any responsibility for any instance of plagiarism committed by the authors. The onus to ensure plagiarism-free work lies with the authors themselves.

IB2307002

Introduction

Somalia is currently experiencing with some of the country's most devastating droughts in 40 years (International Rescue Committee 2022)¹. The combination of successive droughts, accompanied with catastrophic famines, a pandemic, and the ongoing conflict between Russian-Ukraine have created a perfect recipe for a crisis. Somalia is a textbook example of how the economically disadvantaged nations with limited resources are at the receiving end of any international phenomenon. Irrespective of the circumstances, be it a pandemic, a war, or climate change, poorer countries incur the brunt of the burden. However, Somalia has been treading in this direction virtually ever since it gained independence (Khayre 2016).² However, in the very same decade, the situation in Somalia deteriorated to the point where the after-effects are still dominant. Many scholars believe that Siad Barre's autocratic leadership to be the antecedent for all evil in Somalia, whereas some believe that the Somalian trajectory is a product of the Cold War. There is also clannism, Islamic terrorism, and climate change, which has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis that has lasted decades.

This article tries to navigate through some the internal and external impediments which have led to Somalia's current disposition. It shall also ascertain the grounds on which the title of a "failed state" comes into play in the Somalian context and whether it is just a marketing strategy or is there some truth behind it.

Defining a Failed State

A failed state is characterised by ongoing civil war, corruption, crime, poverty, illiteracy, and failing infrastructure. However, the concept remains highly subjective with no single, agreed-upon definition.³ Much like beauty, "failure" too is in the eye of the beholder. The validity of the term "failure" and its

¹ <https://www.rescue.org/article/crisis-somalia-catastrophic-hunger-amid-drought-and-conflict>

² Ahmed Ali. M Khayre, Somalia: An Overview of the Historical and Current Situation, SSRN (2016)

³ Ken Menkhaus, "State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a 'Functional Failed State' in Somalia.", Sage Publications (2014), 154-172

subjectivity can also be challenged considering different interpretations of “state” given by various scholars, political and philosophical thinkers throughout the world’s history. We have Thomas Hobbes who posits that individuals willingly submit to the rule of a state as the only means of self-preservation; whereby he can escape the brutish cycle of mutual destruction resulting from human interaction.⁴ In a similar vein John Locke posits a more optimistic view of human nature or conditions while asserting that the main role of the state is to protect the inherent rights of a man.⁵ Rousseau’s conceptualization of a state reflect a far more positive attitude toward human nature wherein he proposed that the authority a state derives is from the general will of the governed.⁶ For him, it is the will of the people that dictates the law. These three intellectuals present three distinct versions of a state in three different contexts and yet, they have a common thread, in their emphasis on the need for government legitimacy . All three thinkers talk about the social contract between the citizens and their governments, which makes them eligible to rule the masses. Though Hobbes’s theory of social contract does not mention rebelling against an unjust government, according to Locke and Rousseau, as the will of people determines the formation of a state (government), the will of people can also disintegrate or seize the power of that state. Locke does opine about the citizens' right to rebel and overthrow an unjust government.

This article primarily explores the legitimacy component associated with a “failed state”. A failed state that has experienced a breakdown in governance, resulting in an inability to effectively exercise power over its territory and population, as well as an incapacity to safeguard its national borders.. If we consider Rousseau’s definition then in a failed state, the populace ceases to perceive the government as legitimate. This undermines the government in the eyes of the international community. The legitimacy of a government/state is contingent upon the level of contentment and trust of the masses in the government; whether or not the citizens feel secure and their demands and needs are being met.

⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

⁵ John Locke, “Two Treatises of Government”

⁶ Jean Jacques Rousseau, “The Social Contract”

In Somalia, the legitimacy of the government continues to erode. . Battling Islamic terrorism, inter-clan conflicts, and inter-state conflicts – it is evident that Somalia is plagued by conflict. However, what makes the Somali situation dire is the recurring humanitarian crisis.

An Ever-going Somali Crisis

During the Middle Ages, several Somali states reigned the region. However, the situation changed drastically in the 19th century when European nations colonised the Horn of Africa, resulting in the establishment and settlement of French, British and Italian colonies in the ethnically populated lands of Somalia.⁷ For the purpose of rewarding their east African allies, the British erected artificial borders that disrupted the course of Somali history. The land dominated by Somalis but conquered by Ethiopian rulers was regarded by the British as Ethiopian territory. British and Italian Somali land was also merged into what is known as the Somali Republic in 1960.⁸ The drawing of borders didn't just create a rift but also left many Somalis out of what they claimed and called their land for centuries.

Tensions erupted between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Ogaden plateau in 1960.⁹ The then-president Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke was assassinated under mysterious circumstances.¹⁰ However, the military was quick to seize the power and overthrew the civilian government. The Prime minister together with members of his family, as well as former president Aden Abdulle Osman were arrested. The parliament was abolished, the constitution was suspended and all political and social organisations were banned. According to the scholarly perspective of Mohamed Haji Ingiriis it is posited that the Soviet Union and Siad Barre, the authoritarian ruler who ruled the country from October 1969 until January 1991 are

⁷ John W. Harbeson, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa", *Northeast African Studies* (1979), pp 27-44

⁸ John W. Harbeson, "Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa", *Northeast African Studies* (1979), pp 27-44

⁹ Antonio M. Morone, *The Unsettled Southern Ethiopian-Somali Boundary on the Eve of Decolonization: Political Confrontation and Human Interactions in the Ogaadeen Borderland*, *Northeast African Studies* (2015), pp. 93-116

¹⁰ Mohamed Ingiriis, *Who Assassinated the President in October 1969? The Cold War, the Clan Connection, or the Coup d'État*, *African Security*, 2017, 10:2, 131-154

interconnected. He had a crucial role to play in the assassination of President Sharmarke because for the former (Soviets) removing a pro-Western government was paramount, and for the latter, he aimed to seize the power through the ideology of Soviet-style socialism.¹¹

Regime survival was the sole focus of Siad Barre's government which was driven by a narrow set of clan interests. With the de-institutionalisation of the state and its machinery, corruption grew rampant. An authoritarian regime with severe instability was prepared with the recipe fed by Siad Barre.¹² The regime was able to survive largely due to its strategic importance in the context of the Cold War, resulting in substantial inflows of foreign aid flows. By 1987, international development assistance composed 57% of the country's GNP.¹³ In retrospect, the Somali state in its previous form was akin to a castle constructed on sand, doomed to fall when external support was cut off, as it was in the late 1980s following the conclusion of the Cold War.¹⁴ With a small pocket of authoritative and powerful elite governing a massive poverty-stricken population, the creation and reinforcement of extractive economic institutions was inevitable. The external efforts to build the state's institutional capacity failed as foreign aid and funds of all types were diverted and funnelled out of the country by political elites. The concentration of power among select individuals is completely in odds with the establishment of inclusive and sustainable institutions.. The few at the top would keep extractive economic institutions going or otherwise, they would lose their profit-making machinery. This is the primary reason why corrupt governments fail or refuse to stabilise their political and economic institutions.

¹¹ Ibid (2017)

¹² Ken Menkhaus, "State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a 'Functional Failed State' in Somalia.", Sage Publications (2014), 154-172

¹³ Ibid (2014)

¹⁴ Ibid (2014)

From 1988 to 1990, Somalia's military engaged in combat against various armed rebel groups, which ultimately led to the downfall of Siad's regime. By 1991, numerous regions of Somalia had descended into power struggles and clan conflicts.

Somalia has recently witnessed a relatively successful transfer of power from the outgoing President to the current President¹⁵ offering a glimmer of hope amidst political instability. However, the nation has been grappling with significant internal security challenges, as the presence of Al-Shabaab and the associated threat of Islamic terrorism.¹⁶ Additionally, Somalia has been plagued by lasting humanitarian crises, including recurring severe droughts, famine, acute malnutrition and, water shortage for decades. External factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian-Ukraine war have further aggravated the situation in Somalia. The war has not just obstructed the supply of food grains to Somalia but it also has inflated food prices posing considerable challenges in ensuring food security for the entire population.. Each factor has its rippling consequences leading to increased, frequent and severity of individual incidence. Despite the inherent resilience of the Somalian people in navigating adversities, the escalating frequency and intensity of recent incidents have posed significant challenges for communities in effectively coping with the endless crises. Somalia presents as a textbook example of how the weaker or poorer states are the ones worst hit during any international crisis It is truly paradoxical that the least developed nations with negligible or no greenhouse gas emissions are bearing the brunt of climate change without benefiting from it. At this point, it is hard to tell whether it is Somalia that failed or it is the international community that failed a state. Well, it will not be the first time this dilemma has occurred and it certainly would not be the last

Is Somalia a Failed State?

¹⁵ <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14900.doc.htm>

¹⁶ <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/somalias-critical-transition-comes-amid-al-shabab-and-hunger-challenges>

One can see how Somalia is not just grappled with various intra-conflicts but also has been going through humanitarian crises over the years. The instability is not just within the political or economic spheres but also, the social fabric and structure of the Somalian state have been under extreme stress and pressure since its independence. The failure of the Somalian state is not dependent on whether it has developed democratic institutions or even the lack of resources, rather it is the redundancy of the social contract between the government and the masses that makes Somalia a failed state. This is because what use is a state that fails to provide for its citizens most fundamental needs and ensure their safety from external and internal dangers? The skepticism and hopelessness among the masses towards their government for any hope of a better and brighter future is what makes Somalia a failed state.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson. 2012. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. New York, Crown Publishers.
2. Ahmed, Ismail I., and Reginald Herbold Green. “The Heritage of War and State Collapse in Somalia and Somaliland: Local-Level Effects, External Interventions, and Reconstruction.” *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1999): 113–27. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3993185>.
3. Doornbos, Martin, and John Markakis. “Society and State in Crisis: What Went Wrong in Somalia?” *Review of African Political Economy* 21, no. 59 (1994): 82–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4006188>.
4. Ingiriis, Mohamed. (2017). Who Assassinated the President in October 1969? The Cold War, the Clan Connection, or the Coup d’État. *African Security*. 10.1080/19392206.2017.1305861
5. MENKHAUS, KEN. “State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a ‘Functional Failed State’ in Somalia.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 656 (2014): 154–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24541768>.