

Foreign Policy in Somalia resulting in a 'failed state'. Head Quarter of Piracy

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“The pirates are very good at what they do. They’re very well-armed. Tactically, they are very good” (Carlson, 2009). This declaration was made by the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, following the most spectacular hijacking led by Somali pirates. On November 15, 2008, the most important piracy attack took place 833 kilometers off the coast of Kenya. The target was the Saudi-owned 300-meter supertanker *Sirius Star*, carrying over \$100 million USD worth of crude oil (Otterman, & McDonald, 2008). This historical event highlighted the incredible capacity of a newly developed pseudo-business in the Gulf of Aden, the business of piracy. According to the article 101 ‘Definition of Piracy’ of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, piracy is defined as “any illegal act of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft”. In fact, the first pirate attacks took place only 30 years ago and were carried out by a group called the “Somali National Movement” (Maouche, 2011, 18), initially one of the first organized guerilla groups to opposed the regime of the Somali dictator, Siad Barre, in the ’80s. In fact, before piracy became the “second generator of money” in Somalia (Baniela, & Ríos, 2012), the country’s source of revenue mainly depended on the intervention of the Russian and American superpowers who used to bribe Siad Barre with the importation of military and financial aid. At that time, Somalia was just another ‘pawn’ in the middle of the rivalry between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States (US). Nevertheless, if we went further back in time, the Cold War was not the only historical period that led to the failure of the Somali State. In fact, the centralized

structures imposed by the Western colonials, from 1884 to 1960, had for effect to destabilize the traditional Somali system. The country was initially considered as a ‘Segmentary Society’ with a strong level of political self-regulation and the absence of intervention from the central government authority which led to the presence of 4 major pastoral-nomadic clans representing 75 percent of the population, while 20 percent were divided into two other clans and the 5 percent remaining were scattered in coastal communities. However, in 1884, the United Kingdom was the first to establish property in the northern part of Somalia, which later became Somaliland. In 1887, other divisions of the country took place between France and Italy, which respectively led to today’s State of Djibouti and State of Puntland (Maouche, 2011). In addition, the region of Ogaden was given to Ethiopia in 1897, which led, 80 years later, to a dreadful war that will be explained subsequently. Therefore, when entering the Cold War, the stability of the Somali State was already strongly disturbed by global forces.

Nonetheless, this paper will only focus on how Somalia was affected by the Cold War and the ‘humanitarian’ interventions that followed during the terrible famine of 1992. It will enable me to answer the following question: How did the Cold War initiate the failure of the Somali State and progressively led to the development of piracy? Concerning the term ‘failed state’, there was no internationally agreed-upon definition, however, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, a ‘failed state’ can be characterized as an “implosion of the structure of power and authority, the disintegration and

destruction of States, the internal collapse of law and order, and the absence of bodies capable of representing the State at the international level” (Thurer, 1995).

In the research paper, I would like to argue that Somalia’s successive alliance with first the USSR, and then the US, led Somalia to become a ‘failed state’, which subsequently led to the current issue of piracy. I will first explain how the two main rivals of the Cold War contributed to the failure of the Somali State by supporting the regime of Barre. I will then follow on the failure of the US International Aid Response by arguing that their operations were only driven by their own interest which resulted in worsening the economic situation of Somalia. Finally, I will end by explaining how the lack of a stable government and successful economic structure led to the development of a pseudo-business around Piracy.

Firstly, during the conflict of the Cold war, Africa became the competitive ‘playground’ of the two main rivals, the Soviet Union and the United States, for whom each country represented a ‘prize’ to win. In fact, following the decolonization process of African countries, becoming former European colonies, during the period of 1950s to the early 1960s, the Soviet Union saw an opportunity to expand its power against Western dominance. As the Western Bloc already had a strong influence on the Northern part of the African continent, the Eastern Bloc, on its side, focused on Somalia and the strategic advantage it would provide to the USSR’s fight against the US. In order to attract Somalia on its side of the Bloc, the Soviet Union offered the country with military hardware which could be used “to protect the Somali population

in Kenya and Ethiopia” (Mohamed, 2009, 8) due to a strong affiliation between Somali clans and Ethiopian diaspora, and to the presence of “Somali rebel-lion in Kenya” (Woodwell, 2007, 106) during the mid-’60s. Hence, the Soviet Union’s offer of military aid led to the creation of the Russian military aid of 1963. In the meantime, since the country gained independence on July 1, 1960, the country had not been able to maintain a stable government as it had to deal with a number of social and economic issues. This led to a major political crisis as the legislative elections of 1969 failed to implement a stable government leading to the development of a “major political crisis” (Maouche, 2011, 12). This crisis was intensified by the assassination of the President of the Somali Republic, Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, on October 15, 1969. A few days later, this event was followed by a military coup d’état held on October 21 by the military officer of the Supreme Revolutionary Council and resulted in appointing Mohamed Siad Barre as the third president of Somali. Siad Barre overthrew the Somali Republic and established a dictatorship by suppressing the parliament and creating a unique party, the Supreme Revolutionary Council. (Mohamed, 2019). Through his military regime in which Barre promised to create a unified Somalia and combat the presence of corruption, the Soviet Union saw an opportunity to strengthen its ties with Somalia by offering its military support. Therefore, in July 1974, a military-based Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was established between Somalia and the USSR. The Soviet provided Barre’s government with a significant amount of military weapons, including “MoG-21 jet fighters, T-54 tanks, and SAM-2 missile defense system” (Mohamed, 2019, 9).

In return for this military-aid, the Soviet Union was able to establish its military presence at the port of Berbera, providing the growing superpower's naval and air forces with a strategic position to counter the presence of the US, its main rival. Moreover, to ensure its own military interest, in addition to directing the institutional innovation of the Somali secret police organization called the National Security Service, the USSR also supervised the training by giving Soviet diplomats and advisers "easy access to senior members of the regime, and to valuable information" (Brind, 1984, 83). A win-win situation between the USSR and the Somali was observable as Barre's government took advantage of the substantial amount of Russian military inflow to pursue its campaign against eastern Ethiopia to liberate the ethnic-Somali Ogaden region. In fact, Barre's war against Ogaden led the USSR to stop supplying ammunition to Somalia, to instead back up Ethiopia who was considered as a more strategic ally for the Eastern Bloc. As a result, the Somalia-Soviet treaty was abrogated on November 13, 1977, which led to the withdrawal of all Soviet military facilities. Following this 'break-up' Somali forces were expelled from Ogaden on March 9, 1978, as Ethiopia received the help of the Eastern Bloc.

With no longer support from the Soviet Union, the population of Somalia, oppressed by Barre's military dictatorship could have hoped for the dissolution of its regime. In fact, the Ogaden war had for effect to ruin Somalia and, and with the participation of the USSR, to make the country dependent on foreign aid. Adding to Barre's politic that relied on 'detrribalization' and on 'using rivalry between the major clans to secure and

consolidate his power' (Wengraf, 2018), these events led to intensified divisions between clans and subclans, and, eventually, to the anchoring of an unstable state. Actually, starting in the '80s, the Somali National Movement (SNM), composed mainly of members of the Isaak clan in northwestern Somalia, developed in opposition to the current regime and the multiple atrocities committed in central Somalia (Mohamed, 2009). Nevertheless, Siad Barre managed to overthrow the rebellious movement and maintain its control over Somalia as another superpower took over on supplying the dictator regime with weapons.

In fact, following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in its alliance with Somalia, the US saw an opportunity to attract a new 'member' into the Western Bloc by being Somalia's new supplier of military aid. In July 1977, Washington supplied Somalia with defensive weapons against Ethiopia, however, when Barre had already invaded two-thirds of the Ogaden region, the US having no interest in helping Barre expand its power, pressured Somalia to withdraw its troops, in March 1978, by suspending the sending of military supply (Wengraf, 2018). Despite this event, the US resumed its aid toward Barre's government and, therefore, participated in strengthening the latter's one poor "human rights records and corrupted government" (Mohamed, 2009, 11). In return, the former US President Jimmy Carter and Siad Barre signed an agreement, in 1980, giving access to Berbera's port facilities, for the second time, to the American Navy (Laitin, 1982). In exchange for supporting a corrupted government, US interests were fulfilled as the Americans had more control over the Arabian oil fields on which their national security in

terms of “wartime needs and civilian economy” relied heavily (Torres, 2009, 117).

However, slowly, Somalia’s reliance on foreign aid put a barrier to the country’s own development. In addition to the initial military aid, in 1981, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) were introduced in ‘developing’ countries, including Somalia, by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The goals of these programs were to “increase the economic growth of the recipient countries, restore currency convertibility, and renew debt servicing” (Jibril, 2017). In return for providing the loans, the IMF was able to have an input on policy reforms which, in the case of Somalia, ended not stimulating the recipient state’s economy at all. In fact, the implementation of new neoliberal measures resulted in the decrease of government spending on social services in education, health, law, and security as well as the cutting of wage subsidies (Wengraf, 2018). As it was underlined in Adebayo Adedeji’s paper, “Structural adjustment policies in Africa”, the implementation of these programs failed as they did not “acknowledge the fundamental features of the African economies” (Adedeji, 1999, 522) and were not adapted to resolving “deficient basic and social infrastructures” as well as the “undeveloped human resources” (Adedeji, 1999, 522). On the contrary, the SAPs had for effect to reinforce the existing “weak institutional capabilities, lack of [economic] competitiveness and excessive dependence on external factors inputs” (Adedeji, 1999, 522) leading to an increase in poverty as Somalia experienced negative growth in real per capita GDP of 1.98 between 1975 and 1985 while during the 15 previous years, the growth was standing

at -0.48 (Adedeji, 1999). Moreover, the SAPs were paired with food aid programs which resulted in destabilizing Somalia’s agricultural industry. In fact, it prevented the country from growing and diversifying its output since ‘food aid’ was sold at prices below the market-price creating a disadvantage for Somali domestic food producers (Farzin, 1991). Moreover, the counterpart funds from food aid’s revenue which represented 10% of the government budget and were supposed to promote the growth of the food production by financing rural infrastructure projects and creating new employment, were instead mostly invested in the military sector (Farzin, 1991).

In addition to the failure of the SAPs, the Somali political situation worsened as armed conflicts increased until it reached a peak of 50,000 thresholds between 1988 and 1989 (World Peace Foundation, 2015). During this period, most of the violence resulted from the conflict between the opposition armed movement SNM, mentioned previously, and Barre’s regime which got stronger thanks to the foreign financial aid. The conflict arose as the SNM became aware of the government’s incentive to “liquidate” (WPF, 2015) the Isaak clan. Many attacks were launched by the SNM targeting both the towns of Hargeisa and Burao as the government’s Somali National Army continued to launch targeted reprisals against the Isaak community in May and August 1988. These attacks caused the death of more than 50,000 people and the displacement of no less than 400,000 people from the Northwestern area of Somalia (WPF, 2015). In the meantime, with the disintegration of the USSR marking the end of the Cold War in 1991, the American hyperpower lost interest in maintaining its alliance with

Somalia. Accordingly, Barre stopped benefiting from the US military aid which strongly weakened Barre's regime as he lost control of more than three-quarters of the country until he withdrew in January 1991. Barre's departure enabled many clans to take control over their respective areas of the country as the majority of the population used to be excluded from political and economic decision-making.

However, Somalia's state came out of this governance and alliance with foreign countries, more disintegrated than ever. In 1991, there were eleven political armed factions (Wengraf, 2018) such as the United Somali Congress, the Somali Patriotic Movement, and the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, highlighting the strong division among the Somalis. However, the emergence of several conflicts between clans fighting overpower added to severe drought, increased the scarcity of the country's resources, leading to the major famine that hit the country in 1992. Thus, following November 1992, the UN Security Council authorized a US-led coalition of troops, the United Task Force, and launched the United Nations Operation in Somalia I to provide "humanitarian relief" (Wengraf, 2018, 1) in Somalia. Thus, under the cover of humanitarianism to combat the famine, American military interventions were imposed on the territory of Somalia. On December 4, 1992, US President George Bush ordered 28,000 troops (Craig, 2016) into Somalia under Operation Restore Hope which he justified by arguing that Somalia needed US military protection to ensure the distribution of food. In fact, from the \$1.5 billion USD of the United Nations funding, only 10 percent were allocated to humanitarian work as the rest was used for the expansion and

reinforcement of the military troops (Wengraf, 2018). However, foreign politicians' true motive was to pursue their neoliberal economic agenda as, by perpetuating Somalia's dependence on the US, they were able to build "a network of compliant regimes" (Wengraf, 2018, 1). In fact, the foreign policymakers were the main beneficiaries of the indicted international law on Somalia and not the local civilians as it was supposed to be.

Consequently, the military intervention of the US and the presence of the 30,000 peacemakers were not well received by the country. In fact, to manifest their disagreement with this foreign presence on their territory, the chairman of the United Somali Congress, Mohamed Farah Aideed, led an attack against the United Nation troops, causing him to be identified by the United Task Force as the world's first 'Wanted Man.' As a response, the US, as the leading force of the UN deployment, led several assaults, including on October 3, 1993, with the Operation Gothic Serpent. In fact, the American troops launched a terrible raid in the capital of Somalia, Mogadishu, during which, two US Black Hawk helicopters were shot down. This battle resulted in the death of 18 American soldiers as well as hundreds of Somalis (Last, 2017). Following this event, in March 1994, the American president, Bill Clinton, withdrew the US troops from Somalia, and by 1995, the last peacekeepers had left the country. The failure of the International aid interventions highlighted the incapacity of the international bodies to rebuild a central state, which was mainly due to the fact that the interventions were driven by their own geopolitical interests. In fact, the main US military operations, including Operation Restore Hope, had as a main objective, not

to eradicate famine, but to rebuild the US military credibility after their defeat of the Vietnam war on 30 April 1975. Indeed, this war killing no less than 58,000 Americans and more than 3 million Vietnamese, resulted in “undermining the country’s faith in its most respected institution, the military” (Burns, & Novick, 2017). Unfortunately, Somalia was another failure as the country was left in a worse state than before this 15-years long intervention. Moreover, the US’ actions were very controversial as their military operations were supposed to “rescue the people and the state from anarchy and chaos” (Brown, 2006, 4) while, during the Cold War, the US was the first in line to support former Somalia’s dictator by providing him with military aid.

At this time of history, we could already consider Somalia as a ‘failed state’ since, in 1991, Somalia did not have a stable government nor a functional economy. The country was fragmented into multiple independent states with the declaration of independence of the northern part of Somalia, creating Somaliland, and later on, the rebellion in the east part resulting in the creation of the Puntland State. The main driver that pushed Somalis to take part in the criminal activity of piracy was the lack of economic opportunities as Somalia ended up impoverished and wrecked by the multiple civil conflicts and the failure of international interventions. These events had also led to the displacement of many Somalis, 260,000 were registered in Kenya alone, which represented a wide opportunity for pirates’ recruitment (Kellerman, 2011). As piracy was not considered the same in every region of Somalia, this paper mainly focused on the region of Puntland, as, since the region was not recognized as a state and did not have to

obey the international law, piracy was very rapidly considered as a business on its own. In fact, for many pirates, piracy was above all a means of survival which, in the end, led to the ‘acceptance’ of this activity among certain communities. In fact, an inhabitant of Garowe, the administrative capital of Puntland, declared that “piracy in many ways was socially acceptable” (Hunter, 2008). For each community, piracy relied on rules defined by the different clans, as they determined the building and internal organization of the pirate groups. Members of the subclans recruited the pirates who were, generally, 20 to 35 years old men hoping to live the “high life” (Hunter, 2008). By belonging to a clan, the pirates benefited from the clan’s protection which was, indeed, the case in Puntland where clans protected the pirates from being arrested and persecuted by the government (Maouche, 2011). In exchange, the government of Puntland would receive funds from the pirates’ activity, which were estimated to be 30 percent of the clan leaders’ ransom money (Beloff, 2013). This collaboration went even further as the government also provided information on potential targets to facilitate the pirates’ operations and gave them the right to keep the boat close to the shore during negotiations (Maouche, 2011). Moreover, the government was not the only stakeholder of this industry as the financing of the pirates’ activities required venture capitalists. For that matter, pirates were supported by local businessmen who generally received “30 percent of the total ransom money” (Beloff, 2013, 49). The ‘financial sponsors’ enabled the pirates to acquire the supplies necessary to hijack a vessel, which could reach up to \$21,000 USD.

In order to be the most efficient, pirates were divided into two major groups:

sea-based and land-based. Attack teams were the ones leading the operations on the sea and were mainly composed of fishermen due to their strong knowledge of the sea. As they were the first in line, the attackers generally received bonuses, increasing their profit. Onshore, the “brains of the operation” (Maouche, 2011, 20) were in charge of managing the weapons, the logistics, and the bribes. They were mainly international Somalis with strong financial and communication skills. Teams were also composed of former soldiers bringing their military expertise. Nevertheless, although the operational costs were approximately equal to \$300,000 USD, the ransoms gained from hijacking a vessel varied from \$500,000 USD up to \$9 million USD, enabling the actors to rapidly make a profit. In fact, individual pirates’ profits were estimated at \$10,000 to \$15,000 USD (Percy, & Shortland, 2013, 545). Ransoms did not only benefit the pirates themselves but also their families to whom money was given in case of death. The amount of money acquired by the pirates created a gap between pirates’ income and non-pirates’ leaving the latter ones with no choice but to adopt the practice of piracy, as local wages remained low while the increase of consumption from more ‘wealthy’ pirates led to higher prices. This situation underlined the instability of the national economic structure and the exclusion of the country from the world’s trade, as, since the ’90s, the country was defined as a recipient of financial aid only. By developing the ‘piracy industry’, Somalis created their own economic structure involving both the civilians and the authority as seen in the case of Puntland that, with the absence of law and national security, became a weak and corrupted state.

Conclusion

To conclude, the failure of the Somali State was the consequence of both Siad Barre’s governance and the intervention of foreign politics. Indeed, although Somalia was traditionally a country divided into multiple clans, the regime of Barre trying to unify the country by fighting against certain clans, added to the intervention of the US aid to rebuild the ‘broken’ state, resulted in intensifying the tensions between the clans. The situation made it very hard, almost impossible for the country to regain its harmony. If we looked back at the definition of the ‘failed state’ from the International Committee of the Red Cross, Somalia did endure an “implosion of the authority” as there was no central government as well as the “disintegration of the state” into the different clans. Plus, as it was observed, Somalia ended this way under Barre’s authority which was strongly supported by both the USSR and the US, so these two global powers could achieve their geopolitical agenda. Moreover, the dependence on foreign aid established mostly by the US prevented Somalia from developing its own economic system and, consequently, led to the development of piracy. In most regions of Somalia, the criminal activity was quickly accepted by the population, sometimes out of spite as there were no other employment opportunities. In fact, the business of piracy did not require many resources, necessitated only the knowledge of the sea and weapons, which were already acquired by the fishermen and through the many civil conflicts, and made a substantial amount of money. Finally, Somalia’s current ‘failed state’ was still a huge obstacle for fighting against piracy as the absence of national law made it impossible to penalize the pirates for their illegal activity.

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