

**U.S. STRATEGIC INTEREST IN SOMALIA:
From Cold War Era to War on Terror**

by

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“I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Dynamics of Clanship in Somali Society	1
European Colonial Rule	3
Chapter 2 U.S. Strategic Interest in Somalia during the Cold War Era	7
U.S. and Soviet Union in Somalia	7
The Rise of Warlord Phenomena in Somalia	14
U.S. Support for Somali Warlords	16
Chapter 3 Global War on Terror - Post 911	24
The Rise of Islamic Movement in Horn of Africa	24
The Role of Ethiopia in Somalia	34
Conflicts within Somali Government	47
Chapter 4 Failed U.S. Policy in Somalia	67
Bibliography	78

Abstract

This thesis examines United States' policy toward Somalia from the era of the Cold War to that of the more recent and ongoing War on Terror. It asserts that U.S.'s change of policy from Cold War alliance with Somalia to the use of Somalia as a battleground in the War on Terror has resulted in a disorganized and disjointed policy framework. In 1991, an alliance of warlords defeated President Siad Barre's regime that supplied Somalia's last central government and that was allied to the US. Subsequently, the victorious warlords turned on one another, resulting in clan feuds that destabilized the Somali state. In March 1994, this chaos engulfed US troops engaged in a humanitarian mission, resulting in the death and humiliation of several American soldiers in the so-called Black Hawk Disaster that led to the withdrawal of US troops and interests from Somalia. However, following the events of September 11, 2001, in which Islamic extremists attacked the Twin Towers in New York City and the ensuing launching of War on Terror, the United States became suspicious that Somalia was now a breeding ground for terrorist attacks against American interests in East Africa. This threat increased when Islamic Court Union (ICU) consolidated its power in southern Somalia after defeating US-allied warlords in June 2006. The ICU did bring a respite of law and peace for some six months, following fifteen years of warfare and chaos. But this was short-lived. Armed with economic and political support from Washington, neighboring Ethiopia invaded southern Somalia and occupied Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, under the pretext of the War on Terror. As many as 1 million people are reported to have been displaced and more than 10,000 were estimated to have been killed in Mogadishu.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Dynamics of Clanship in Somali Society

It is imperative to understand Somali history, society, and culture in order to evaluate U.S- Somali relations during the Cold War and War on Terror. Somalia is located in the Horn of Africa, adjacent to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Peninsula. Historically, it was similar to numerous cultures in and around the region. For example, in ancient times, the Egyptians glorified Somalia as a “God’s Land” (the Land of Punt);¹ Greek merchants who traveled on Red Sea called it the “Land of Blacks.” Arab neighbors used to refer to this land as *Berberi*. German scholars observed that the Samaal people, who give Somalia its name, inhabited and occupied the whole Horn of Africa as early as 100 A.D.² This theory diverges from the popular myth that the Somali people (also known as *Samaale* or *Samaal*) originated from Arab roots.³ Indeed, historians and archeologists have revealed that Somalis share language, traditions, and culture with Eastern Cushitic genealogical groups.⁴ The Eastern Cushitic ethnic sub-family includes: the Oromo, most populated ethnic group in Ethiopia; the Afar people who inhabited between Ethiopia and Djibouti; the Beja tribes of Eastern Sudan; and the Boni tribes of Northeastern Kenya. In other words, modern Somalis are richly embedded in African culture.⁵

¹ Jacquetta Hawkes, *Pharaohs of Egypt* (New York: American Heritage, 1965), 27.

² Helen Chapin Metz, ed. *Somalia: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division Library of Congress, 1992), 5

³ Ali Ahmed, *The Invention of Somalia* (New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 5.

⁴ Lee Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 23

⁵ B. Lynch & L. Robins, *New Archaeological Evidence from North-West Kenya*. (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 320.

The four major tribes of Somali lineage are nomadic and pastoral: Dir, Darood, Isaaq, and Hawiye. These nomad tribes constitute around 70 percent of the Somali population. The two smaller agricultural tribes – Digil and Rahanweyn – make up only 20 percent, while 10 percent of the population is comprised of coastal dwellers whose economy is based on fishing and farming. It is imperative to understand the role and history of clan politics and how it developed over the centuries to shape the modern government in Somalia. Traditionally, nomadic society mastered the art of forming alliances to protect the interests of kingship and ensure water and grazing land. Rainfall, in particular, is very critical to the life of pastoral communities. It is the main factor that forces them to compete with other tribes and to move from one inhospitable place to another. Although they expect two rainy seasons, some localities never see one drop of rain and experience severe droughts, costing nomads most of their livestock. In the 20th century, there were six harsh droughts across several regions of Somalia that lasted more than two years and produced famine.⁶

Tribal elders play an important role in the process of securing water. They make the final decisions in waging war and making peace with other neighboring tribes and relocating clan-families to new territories.⁷ Tribal elders sit on the council of leadership that administers most clan affairs, down to relatively small matters, like marriage arrangements within the clan-family. The relationship between different tribes always

⁶ I. M. Lewis, Brief descriptions of the major Somali drought in the 20th Century, including that of 1973 - 75, can found in *Abaar: The Somali Drought*. (London, 1975) pp. 1-2, 11-14.

⁷ While anthropologists might use tribe and clan in different terms, in Somali language, both (clan-family and tribe) mean the same.

depends on how tribal elders manage conflicts and enforce previous agreements. However, an agreement might not last long. Therefore, it is the role of elders to find some sort of resolution to crises before things get out of hand and an endless cycle of revenge ensues. It must be said that these tumultuous situations and conflicts are positive in that they cement together clan-families against the threat presented by other tribes. This is necessary, as with political circumstances shifting continuously, it is hard to predict when another skirmish or war might take place. Yet, insecurity and suspicion within the clan remains high where negotiation and conflict resolution are not possible. In his book, Lee V. Cassanelli summarizes Somali clan politics by translating Somali proverb:

I and my clan against the world

I and my brother against the clan

I against my brother⁸

European Colonial Rule

Over the centuries, the Somali people have demonstrated, as part of their tradition, a vigorous independence and unwillingness to surrender to a single political authority. Clan leaders never quite had the authority to enforce rules on all people; rather, their role was to remind people of the importance of strong clan consciousness, stressing ancestral pride, as the clan has been the integral part to their survival and existence since ancient times.

⁸ Cassanelli, 21

It is important to discuss the reaction of Somali nomadic society to the European-introduced modern Somali state. A clash of cultures invariably resulted from different conceptions of law as it relates to the person. The European concept sees the state as responsible for individual rights; inherently, it does not recognize the nomadic system of justice, based on collective responsibility. Over the centuries, the Somali coastal area has entertained various outside rulers, including the Omanis, the Zanzibaris, the Sharifs of Mukha in present day Yemen, and the Ottoman Turks. One thing these rulers had in common was that they did not disturb the nomadic lifestyle or interfere in their clan-family politics, because they knew Somalis were used to being ungoverned and therefore suspicious of foreigners. However, everything changed when the Somali Peninsula and East Africa were dragged out of relative isolation into world politics. This was only the start of the imperial epoch. In 1885, rival European powers – Great Britain, France, and Italy – divided amongst themselves land populated by the Somali ethnic group in the Horn of Africa.⁹ This territory was essentially ruled by clans until Great Britain took the northern territory near the Red Sea, close to its other colonies in Aden; while the least-experienced European colonies, Italy, was granted Southern Somaliland. The French took hold of what is today known as Djibouti, a tiny nation on Red Sea. Ethiopia also grabbed a chunk of Somali land called the Ogaden (see Figure 1 & 2).

⁹ Scott Peterson, *Me Against my Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda* (London: Routledge, 2000), 11



FIGURE 1: Political Map of Africa¹⁰



FIGURE 2: Map of Somalia and Neighboring Countries¹¹

The British and Italians had different strategies and interests in Somalia. Britain was interested in Northern Somalia, mainly as source of livestock for its colony in Aden,¹² its principal supply route to Indian Ocean through the Suez Canal. British occupied Aden in 1839. Italians, on the other hand, wanted crops in the form of plantation agriculture: bananas, sugarcane, and citrus fruits. As soon as the British colonial government started asserting its authority over Somalia at the turn of the century, resistance took shape under the leadership of Somali nationalist Sayyid Mohammed Abdille Hasan: known to the British as “the Mad Mullah”.¹³ His Islamic resistance movement sought to end European

¹⁰ World Atlas. Retrieved April 20 2009, from <http://www.world-atlas.us/africa-map.gif>

¹¹ US Politics. Retrieved April 21 2009, from <http://www.uspolitics.about.com>

¹² Cassanelli, 148

¹³ Abdi Sheik-Abdi, *Somali Nationalism: Its Origin and Future*. (England: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 658

rule and Ethiopian incursion in Somali territories. He used both religion and nationalism to advance his cause and successfully united Northern Somali tribes against the foreigners until his death in 1920. The use of force by British never produced a better outcome, but Sayyid Mohammed won many followers, especially among his own clan. He dared to suggest the possibility of a free and united Somalia. While British and Italian colonies were vying for control of the Somali Peninsula during the World War II, Somalis continued to mistrust and undermine the authority of their colonial rulers. As a result, the first modern Somali political group was formed in 1943. The Somali Youth League (SYL) articulated the need for national unity and, by extension, discouraged division and feuding between clan-families. This new ideology worked; the SYL helped Somalis realize that the only way to succeed and overcome colonial occupation was to unite against it.¹⁴ Against a common rival, a national consciousness was beginning to form. The political pressure also helped to improve lives: colonial rulers took steps for economic development, better education, and healthcare for growing urban communities. The SYL's main focus, of course, was to end colonial rule and liberate the nation from foreign influence and domination. This did not happen overnight; however, the organization succeeded well in easing ill-feelings between tribes and compromising the clan system. The creation of a Somali state in 1960 could not have happened without this foundation.¹⁵

¹⁴ M. I. Egal, *Somalia: Nomadic Individualism and the Rule of Law* (Oxford University Press, Jul., 1968), 220

¹⁵ B. Braine, *Storm Clouds over the Horn of Africa*. *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oct., 1958), 437

CHAPTER 2

U.S. STRATEGIC INTEREST IN SOMALIA DURING THE COLD WAR ERA

The U.S. and Soviet Union in Somalia

U.S involvement in Africa was limited before World War II, with the exception of a few commercial treaties signed with selected countries in West Africa. Generally speaking, Washington was not interested in African affairs and voiced no real objection to European domination of the continent. However, there was some attention to Africa when, on January 18, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson offered his famous Fourteen Points declaration to a Joint Session of Congress in which he spoke about the principle of self-determination and governance.¹⁶ At that time, President Wilson wanted to counter the German threat which had changed the American attitude toward European Colonies. His stance had obvious implications for the millions of Africans subjected to foreign rule.

The Atlantic Charter, signed in 1941 by President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, was another initiative to promote world peace by compromising imperialism. Both leaders recognized the importance of colonial people's rights to self-determination and self-governance.¹⁷ After World War II, the Soviet Union entered world political affairs in opposing Western domination and imperialism. As a result, the Western bloc became still more proactive in promoting democracy in the former colonial

¹⁶ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Nineties* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 429

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21

countries.

World War II's end marked the beginning of de-colonization in Somalia in earnest. The process was not always perfect. Upon Somali independence in 1960, British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland united under one flag, yet colonial boundaries granted Ethiopia, Kenya, and France control over territories in which ethnic Somalis make up the majority of the general population. While these three countries remained allies of the United States, the U.S did not want to sever relations with Somalia because of the Soviet threat and strategic importance of Africa's Horn region. As a result, the U.S promised financial and military aid to Somalia; however, the Soviet-led Eastern bloc also offered a similar deal in pursuit of its geographic advantages. Thus, Somalia became a prize during the Cold War; even President Kennedy recognized this development and met with Somali Prime Minister Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke in 1962. However, the Soviet Union ultimately offered what Somalia wanted most: more military hardware (the Russian military aid agreement of 1963) to protect the Somali population in Kenya and Ethiopia.¹⁸ On October 21, 1969, the armed forces, led by General Siad Barre, overthrew the civilian regime (former democratically elected leader Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke was assassinated by one of his own security guards during his visit in the drought-stricken area of the Las-Anod District, in the northern part of Somalia). Quickly, the usurping government adopted scientific socialism, nationalized all major private corporations, prohibited political parties, and shut down the parliament. U.S influence in Somalia apparently ended as Somalia and the Soviet signed a prestigious treaty of friendship.

¹⁸ I. M. Lewis, *Modern History of Somalia* (London: Westview Press 1988), 209

On November 1, 1969, General Siad Barre established the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC). The organization announced its intention to fight and abolish tribalism and nepotism, major obstacles to progress and growth in the nine years of civilian, democratic government. The nation was in perpetual financial crisis and overly dependent on foreign assistance to meet its operating budget. A majority of Somali people welcomed the new military regime's promise to clean up the sort of corruption that had been tolerated in the previous administration. Popular acceptance helped facilitate Barre's initiatives like "Scientific Socialism" and the battle against tribalism, thought to be the true cancer of Somali society. Indeed, an official government slogan stated, "Tribalism divides where Socialism unites."¹⁹

The new government won the hearts and minds of the people by promoting a new self-reliance and self-supporting mentality. This helped to encourage a national, rather than clan, consciousness, for it lessened dependence on traditional clan lineage for survival. The main dream for every Somali was to be unified, including those living under Ethiopian and Kenyan rule. Over the first eight years of the Barre regime, the Soviet-Somali relationship grew into a significant military alliance. The two countries signed an agreement that brought Soviet military capabilities to Somalia. Numerous, sophisticated Russian weapon systems appeared, including MiG-21 jet fighters, T-54 tanks, and SAM-2 missile defense system.²⁰ In return, the Soviets were allowed a base at the port of Berbara port, near the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. From this strategic location, they could

¹⁹ I. M. Lewis, *Modern History of Somalia* (London: Westview Press 1988), 209

²⁰ Metz, 119

counter United States military movement in the Middle East and North Africa and control trade. A more sinister aspect of the agreement saw the Soviet Union's KGB training Somalia's own secret police organization, the National Security Services (NSS), which could detain people indefinitely for any manufactured allegation.²¹ The ambition of a greater, stronger Somalia come to fruition when Siad Barre invaded Ethiopia to liberate the ethnic-Somali Ogaden region in 1977.

Ironically, the 1977-8 Somalia-Ethiopian War, enabled by Soviet support, was the severing point in the friendship between the Cold War nations. The Soviets elected to support Ethiopia against the nationalistic plans of its audacious neighbors. The Somali National Army lost the war when a full Eastern bloc (comprised of Cuba, East Germany, Libya, South Yemen, the Soviet Union army) attached themselves to the Ethiopian cause.

Of course, Somalia was not doomed to float out at sea. In a polarized world, a Soviet enemy was automatically the United States' friend. Here, Washington found an opportunity to normalize relations with Mogadishu. It offered military equipment to Somalia in order to counterbalance Soviet and Cuban support for Ethiopia. Somalia, built by Soviet aid, joined the Western camp in 1978, thus verifying the old cliché that there are "no permanent friends nor permanent enemies."

During the Cold War, the United States had a definite history in its African Enterprise of supporting ruthless dictators, who committed atrocities and violate the fundamental human rights of their own citizens. It was only required that these thugs somehow suit

²¹Metz, 188

American interests. This policy has long compromised key principles of the Constitution: due process of law, respect for individual freedom and human rights, free and fair democratic elections, and a free market economy. Yet such opportunism remains a fixture of American foreign policy. Somalia fits the trend. Despite Siad Barre's poor human rights records and corrupt government, the United States provided him with the economic aid to sustain his government and military aid to protect Somalia from Ethiopia's hostile Marxist regime. Here, one of many American-Soviet proxy wars was waged where mutually assured destruction prevented a direct clash. Like Zaire's notorious Mobutu Sese Seko, Barre benefited handsomely from America's support and blind eye (see Figure 3). His regime survived the 80s, receiving grants and flexible loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and food aid through USAID²², which was distributed amongst camps and displaced communities, as a result of a refugee flood from war-torn Ogeden region of Eastern Ethiopia. In return, the United States received its strategic naval base at Berbera.

Strategically speaking, this was a win-win situation between the two allies. However, Barre's gloomy shadow lingered over American integrity. Here was an illegal dictator who neither tolerated political opposition nor so much as attempted to compromise in crafting solutions acceptable in all parties. Rather, he preferred to act as a thug, using force to eliminate any clan-family sympathizing with the opposition. His military forces committed unnecessary atrocities in central Somalia in particular, where they burnt villages, slaughtered thousands of innocent people, and raped women. Barre was highly

²² Graham Hancock, *Lord of Poverty: The Freewheeling Lifestyles, Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the Multibillion Dollar Aid Business*. (London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1989), 24

antithetical to what the United States was supposedly pursuing. It is no wonder that, in mid 80s, a rising opposition movement demanded fair representation in the government. When Barre ignored this element, the opposition armed itself as the insurgent Somali National Movement (SNM), its aim simply to overthrow the Barre regime.²³



FIGURE 3

Siad Barre sitting with Ronald Reagan. Courtesy Somali Embassy in Washington, D.C.

²³ Ahmed I. Samatar, *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 118

The SNM's guerrilla army briefly seized two major cities in Northern Somalia – Hargeisa and Buro – in 1988. Barre and his superior American weapons reacted by emphatically crushing the SNM movement. He essentially leveled the rebel cities.²⁴ Many civilians died in the crossfire; thousands more fled their homes for the countryside, where water and shelter were short.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, so too did the polarization of the world. The United States no longer had any real need for Somalia. It was now convenient to withdraw the support that had long enabled Barre's rule and the illegalities that characterized it. When the United States suspended all financial aid to the Barre's regime, his security apparatus swiftly collapsed. Sensing the regime's vulnerability, rebel forces – taking the form of the United Somali Congress (USC) – led by Mohamed Farah Aideded stormed Mogadishu. Barre fled the capital in January, 1991.²⁵ With the shared enemy eliminated, so too did any reason for the resistance movement to be unified. The same warlords who brought down the dictator continued to fight among themselves for power and control; thus regional, clan politics returned to Somalia at the worst possible time.²⁶

The United States neglected its former Cold War ally until the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Now, embroiled in another global conflict, the United States found new strategic interest in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. This time, aid was offered to Somali

²⁴ Anna Simons, Somalia and the Dissolution of the Nation-State (*American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 96, No. 4, Dec., 1994), 823

²⁵ Scott Peterson, *Me Against my Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda* (London: Routledge, 2000), 15

²⁶ Samatar, 121

warlords and former Somali rival, Ethiopia, to fight America's proxy war. President George Bush announced that Ethiopia could serve as an important strategic ally against international terror networking. Therefore, in 2005, he oversaw a \$450 million donation in food aid, engineered by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The Rise of Warlord Phenomenon in Somalia

The warlord phenomenon started soon after the collapse of the central government in Somalia in 1991. This was the era of the United Somali Congress (USC) rebel movement, characterized by much unfortunate chaos and violence. When USC leadership (predominately from the Hawiye tribe) could not reconcile its political differences, it descended into infighting which took the form of outright war, given that the USC was, in fact, a tribal militia at heart. This struggle had two sides: one side was loyal to self-appointed president Ali Mahdi Mohammed and the other side to General Mohamed Farah Aideed. For a year the power struggle afflicted the Somali people with loss of lives and property. The two men's quarrel became everyone's problem. Too often, this is the case in modern-day Somalia. Neither leader could claim a decisive victory or take control of government institutions. Consequently, peace and security in the nation's capital were threatened.

These leaders were entrapped in Somali tradition. They exploited that tradition while bearing the guise of modern diplomacy and tact. They effectively turned the struggle for control of the USC into a fight for clan supremacy. The combatants recruited fighters

from their own clan-families and committed themselves to clan, rather than Somali nation interests.

Aideed and Mahdi were vying for presidency of the entire nation. Although their collaboration had already toppled the Siad Barre regime, they did not understand that compromise worked. Now they had worked together to defeat a dictatorship: each settled to become a local political leader of his respective clan-family in the hope he would thereby control government institutions for the benefit of his own sector of the Somali people. Interestingly, the two “candidates” were members of the same Hawiye tribe of Mogadishu and central Somalia. Aideed belonged to Habar-Gidir sub-clan family, while Mr. Mahdi was a member of the Abgal sub-clan. Thus, General Aideed and Mr. Mahdi subdivided Hawiye tribe into two sub clans over which they presided as warlords. This development marked a “slippery slope” which was incompatible with the modern nation-state. Hence, “Warlordism” became an accepted part of Somali political culture. With so much threat from other clans, every major clan-family had to grow its military leaders and militias in order to protect itself. After all, the government itself was infested with warlords. So there was little protection – let alone examples of good state governance – coming from the Somali State Capital.

In summary, while clan elders and chiefs were still responsible for clan family affairs in villages, warlords were the players upon the national stage. They kept away from clan business which might create conflicts with traditional elders and chiefs. The warlords

concerned themselves with warfare; they knew no other way of getting things done. In effect, they were – and still are – Somalia’s nightmare, an unending plague.

U.S. Support for Somali Warlords

The United States reevaluated its foreign policy following the Soviet collapse and the subsequent end of the Cold War. Somalia marked one of the changes. Since there was no longer significant strategic importance to the Horn region of Africa, the U.S. ended all economic and military aid to Siad Barre’s regime, leaving him with no leg to stand on. Encouraged, insurgents rose to armed struggle against the demoralized and poorly equipped national army. Suddenly, Barre’s government resembled a pushover. It quickly ceased to exist, but the transition was less than ideal. Somalia went from one to many rulers; already in battle mode, warlords took to fighting each other where there was no Barre to unite against. Thus, anarchy replaced law and order. Somali went back to traditional clan warfare. This sort of chaos was part of the old, nomadic culture but hardly compatible with the requirements of a modern nation state. The clan-family system and its culture of violence took its toll. Major clan-families aligned themselves behind warlords. All seeking protection of their own interests and territories, they wound up infringing heavily upon each other, fueling a prolonged civil war in the country. Countless innocent people lost their lives because of the fighting. More severe, however, was the starvation it left in its wake. 1992 saw a historic famine. A full quarter of Somalia’s nine-million people experienced malnourishment. Here, conscience got the better of the United States and international community. The United Nations took up a

humanitarian intervention geared at getting help to starving people in the countryside. This was easier said than done. It quickly became apparent that the United States could not aid Somalia without embroiling itself in the civil war. Warlords were blocking United Nations' aid shipments from reaching people in need. President George H. W. Bush's administration introduced a new initiative called "Operation Restore Hope" before it left office in late 1992. This effort saw the United States partner with United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali in the deployment of 30,000-strong peacekeeping force to oversee safe and effective delivery of humanitarian food to the starving people. President Bush went to the town of Baida, which the media had dubbed "City of Death," to witness what the effort was accomplishing – and exactly what it was up against.

Bill Clinton replaced George H.W. Bush in office in 1993. He continued, and in fact expanded, his predecessor's involvement in Somalia. Now the humanitarian mission started to turn into a political and nation-building effort.²⁷ However, in pursuit of the best government, U.N. and U.S. officials actually helped to exacerbate strife by pitting one warlord against another. One prime example was when Belgian peacekeepers enabled warlord Mohamed Said Morgan to capture the southern Somali town of Kismayo from General Mohamed Farah Aideed's ally, Mohamed Omar Jess.²⁸ This action infuriated Aideed and his followers (see Figure 4). Many violent protests ensued against U.N. humanitarian efforts, involving road bombs and skirmishes with Pakistani

²⁷ Craig Unger, *The Fall of the House of Bush: House of Bush, House of Saud*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 176

²⁸ Peterson, 65

peacekeepers.

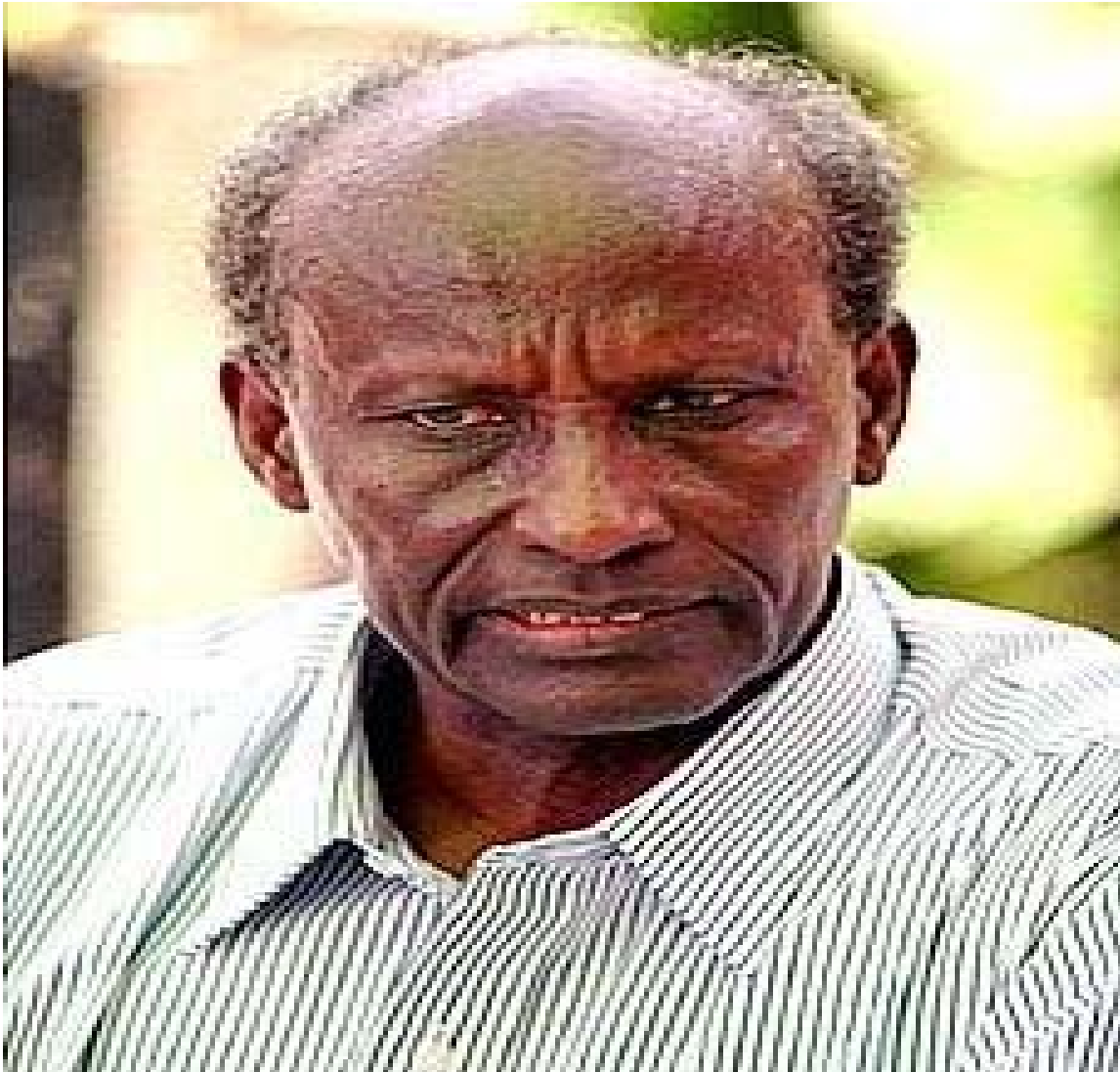


FIGURE 4

General Mohamed Farah Aideed²⁹. Courtesy Hobyoy.net

Here, U.S. policy completed its transformation from a humanitarian to military mission and ordered the arrest of General Aideed. This mistake shows the extent to which the United States failed to understand the culture and the clan politics of this nomadic nation. Admittedly, Aideed was a ruthless thug and a poor model for humanity; yet when U.S.

²⁹ Aideed's photo was retrieved from <http://www.hobyoy.net>

and U.N coalition started to hunt him down, he became an automatic hero for Somalis because of his willingness to stand up to the world's remaining superpower. As mentioned before, there has always been conflict among tribes; however, as soon as a foreign threat manifests itself, old clan rivalries give way to unity against the common threat. The clans, after all, are separate pieces of one shared, regional culture; here is where they become *Somali*.

Aideed mobilized Somalia's clans, including rivals, against the foreigners. In response, the United States and United Nations escalated the conflict. This led to eighteen American servicemen losing their lives and the infamous shooting down of two Black Hawk helicopters.³⁰ The nation-building effort never succeeded because of misunderstanding of Somali culture and misguided foreign policy based on unnecessary use of force rather than political resolution. The war became an embarrassment to the Clinton administration especially, particularly when images surfaced of an American serviceman being dragged through the street of Mogadishu. This was about enough. President Clinton admitted the failed U.S. policy toward Somalia and announced that he was bringing forces home.³¹ In 1994, U.S. and international forces left Somalia, having been defeated by militias a few-hundred strong.

Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin-Laden missed no time in claiming responsibility for the U.S. defeat in Somalia. The Saudi terrorist leader said that he had provided Somali militants with the sophisticated air-missiles that had shot down the two Black Hawk helicopters.

³⁰ Mark Bowden, *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*. (New York: Penguin, 2000), 90

³¹ Richard Clarke, *Your Government Failed You: Breaking the Cycle of National Security Disasters*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 35

He insisted that U.S. Army had no backbone to fight and die in such wars.³² He threatened to continue his own struggle until United States interests all over the world were in ruins. Thus, the new threat of Islamic radicalism effectively replaced fifty years of Cold War. This, however, was a different kind of enemy.

Somalia always has been a strategic location, but the U.S. effectively neglected it between Clinton's 1994 pullout and the advent of the War on Terrorism in 2001. Washington feared the impact of terrorism growing all around the world,³³ particularly in failed states such as Somalia and Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda threatened more than once that they would bring their *jihad* against the U.S. and its regional ally, Ethiopia. In response, Washington committed another foreign policy blunder. As allies, it solicited none other than the Somali warlords who had effectively feudalized and starved the country. Thus, against its policy and ideals, the United States effectively legitimized their reign of terror. In the process of continued feuding for control of territories, warlords established two semi-autonomous governments: Somaliland in the northwest and Puntland in the northeast of Somalia. Southern Somalia, including Mogadishu and Kismayo, were still lawless – ravaged by clan warfare and mired in destruction and starvation.³⁴ American's primary goal was to partner any allies in support of the War on Terrorism in the Horn region.

³² Dinesh D'Souza, *The Enemy at Home: The Culture Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11*. (New York: Random House, 2007), 213

³³ Mathew Blood, "The U.S. Role in Somali's Misery"; available from <http://www.greenleft.org.au/2008/778/39996>; Internet; accessed 25 November 2008

³⁴ Ken Menkhaus, *State Collapse in Somalia: Second Thoughts* (*Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 30, No. 97, The Horn of Conflict, Sep., 2003), 406

George W. Bush came to Oval Office promoting “compassionate conservatism.”³⁵ His balanced, humble foreign policy outlook quickly changed following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Starting in December 2001, President Bush decided to expand U.S. involvement in the Horn of Africa once again. He declared Ethiopia to be the principal regional ally against terrorism. Just as Somalia benefited from U.S. economic aid during the Cold War because of its strategic location, its neighbor (Ethiopia) now emerged as favored nation, benefitting from aid from the U.S. Agency for International Development. Thus, Ethiopian government and Somali warlords were sought to hunt and neutralize suspected terrorists hiding in the region.

In Somalia, Washington endeavored to build a new association: The Alliance for Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism. This was comprised of regional warlords. The United States paid each \$150,000 per month for his cooperation.³⁶ This type of unilateral action severely undermined the new transitional government by further legitimizing states within a state and, effectively, feudalism. This is not what Somalia needed; the President of Somali government, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed (who, like some of his ministers, had past lives as a warlord) continually reiterated the need for U.S. political, military, and humanitarian aid for his weak government. The American policy failed, as the Somali people rejected the coalition between violent warlords and Ethiopia. The former only brought lawlessness and instability; the latter was opportunistic at best, and more likely a prospective colonist. It is no surprise, then, that when conflict started

³⁵ David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Random House, 2003), 5

³⁶ John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen, “Blowing the Horn”. International Crisis Group – Foreign Affairs. (March/April 2007). Retrieved from www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4679

between U.S. backed warlords and Islamic Court Union (ICU), the majority of Somalis supported the ICU – seen to be the only real hope for a peaceful Somalia.

Washington’s policy, already a failure, only escalated the crises by labeling the ICU as extremist and soliciting Ethiopia, a major recipient of American arms since the Cold War ended, to deal with the ICU in a sort of proxy war in the grander scheme of the War on Terror. Of course, U.S. officials declined to directly address the question of backing for Somali warlords, who styled themselves as a counterterrorism coalition in pursuit of continued American support. For instance, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack vaguely told reporters:

“The United States would work with responsible individuals . . . in fighting terror. It's a real concern of ours – terror taking root in the Horn of Africa. We don't want to see another safe haven for terrorists created. Our interest is purely in seeing Somalia achieve a better day.”³⁷

The United States’ gamble on the warlords failed when the increasingly well-supported ICU crushed them. The Islamic organization took control Mogadishu and most of southern Somalia. Now, in a disastrous blow to U.S. anti-terrorism initiative as a whole, it revealed its Islamist character. This included the introduction of a harshly-interpreted *Sharia* which punished all outlaws, prohibited the consumption of alcohol and use of stimulant *khat*, required women to wear veils, and banned movies and televised World

³⁷ Emily Wax and Karen DeYoung, “US Secretly Backing Warlords in Somalia”, Washington Post 17 May, 2006, sec. A01

Cup soccer games on television. The ICU brand of Islam might have been an abomination in better times, however most people saw no better choice. The United States failed to internalize just how insecure Somalia had become, when it chose to support the warlords who had caused this problem. As a reward, it now had an incredibly hostile governing body to deal with. With the ICU effectively in power, the country's new, weak transitional government has been operating largely out of neighboring Kenya and the southern city of Baidoa. Most of Somalia was in anarchy, ruled by a patchwork of competing warlords; the capital was too unsafe for even Prime Minister Ali Muhammad Ghedi to visit. He described U.S. officials' involvement in the conflict between Somali warlords and ICU as dangerous and shortsighted, arguing that this was undermining his government:

“We would prefer that the U.S. work with the transitional government and not with criminals. This is a dangerous game. Somalia is not a stable place and we want the U.S. in Somalia. But in a more constructive way. Clearly we have a common objective to stabilize Somalia, but the U.S. is using the wrong channels.”³⁸

³⁸ Emily Wax and Karen DeYoung, “US Secretly Backing Warlords in Somalia”, Washington Post 17 May, 2006, sec. A01

CHAPTER 3

GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR – POST 9/11

The Rise of Islamic Movement in Horn of Africa

It has already been seen that, after the fall of Said Barre in 1991, opportunistic warlords effectively feudalized Somalia back into a dark age. Their bands ravaged the country amidst uncontrollable civil war, as they battled for strategic towns and regional footholds. Anyone who could piece together an army or militia could obtain a piece of Somalia. Accordingly, a group of northeastern Islamists wasted no time in grabbing Garowe Town in 1992. While the majority of the Somali population is Muslim (99%, predominantly Sunni), the nation had long sustained itself without a theocratic thrust. Religious leaders have always been respected and honored for their knowledge of the Islam, yet the Somali culture traditionally draws a line between their realm and those of state, government, and clan. Generally, clerics have neither sought to influence clan politics nor claim any particular leadership position other than that of *teacher*.³⁹

Over the centuries, Somalia pastoral society perpetuated its own Islamic tradition. Fundamentalism held little appeal for it. Clan society saw only harm in strict Salafist ideas. Particularly abrasive among these were rigid *Sharia* law and new, rank-and-file leadership which could only confront and undermine the time-honored clan system. That is why pastoral Somalia had rejected Islamist militant fervor in the past. It saw instability

³⁹ Metz, 97

rather than tranquility in the usurpation of power from the most basic social units. It was not easy for the phenomenon of hard-line Islamism to survive in the Somali nomadic society without the support of clan leaders, not to mention the common people as an entirety. However, fundamentalism – based in sources to which no one could answer (i.e. the Koran) – was equally hard to squelch entirely. Like a parasite, it would always find a way to breed and perpetuate its kind. The Islamist part of Somali society and its leadership came from different tribes and regions. However, a single goal unified all of the elements: to rule the land under Islamic law. The movement was effectively against all of Somali history. Often construed as antiquated, fundamentalists actually think themselves progressive. The Somali version believed that the ancient clan system was un-Islamic and in need not of realignment, but abolition. This idea was brash and radical. Its fate in Garowe Town suggests a basic rift with the Somali people and time. The clan system brought down the fundamentalists when northeastern communities learned that the group's principal leader, Sheikh Hasan Dahir Aways (future head of the Islamic Court Union), was a member of Hawiye tribe which belongs to same clan as General Mohamed Farah Aideed. Aideed had achieved infamy as the notorious warlord who led the rebel USC in overthrowing Siad Barre's government and instigating genocide against the Darood clan in the south. Many of the victims fled from their homes in Mogadishu for refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Well-known African Horn historian Said Samatar described the relationship between Islam and Somali tribal tradition as follows:

“Somalia will never be a breeding ground for Islamic terrorism” the main reason being, the Somali politics shaped as it is “to an extraordinary degree, by a central principle that overrides all others, namely the phenomenon that social anthropologists refer to as the segmentary lineage system”⁴⁰

Exploring the phenomenon further, Samatar agreed with what Professor Cassanelli argued about the systematic division among Somali society:

“My uterine brother and I against my half brother, my brother and I against my father, my father's household against my uncle's household, our two households, against the rest of the immediate kin, the immediate kin against non-immediate members of my clan, my clan against others and, finally, my nation and I against the world.”⁴¹

Accordingly, Islamist leaders often lost the battle between religious and clan loyalty. This was the precise fate of the northeastern Islamists in Garowe Town. Sheikh Aweys looked outside of his clan to establish and recruit an Islamic militia. He failed. Local tribal leaders and residents defined him as an outsider and enemy of the Darood who wanted to unmake the peace that they had enjoyed since the collapse of central government. When Aweys and his followers lost the support of the people, clan warlord and future Somali president Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed mobilized his militia to oust the Islamists from Gorowe and the region. That is the best example of the old clan system

⁴⁰ Samatar, 1992: 629

⁴¹ Ibid., 629

overpowering the incursion of hard-line Islamic ideas.

However, it was just as difficult to destroy radical Islamism as it was to defeat the clan system. The movement did not die; rather, it changed its strategy and point of attack to the southern regions where there was far more violence, chaos, and anarchy to exploit. For several years, the Islamists went underground and quietly reorganized under the radar. Then, in 1996, they announced a new organization called Al-Itahad al-Islamiya, based in Gedo in the southwest, near the Ethiopian and Kenyan borders.⁴² Here, warlords and tribal leaders had only a very loose handle. Al-Itahad al-Islamiya perceived a power vacuum and sought to take advantage of it. Sheikh Dahir Aweys, previously defeated by northeastern warlord Abdulahi Yusuf Ahmed in 1992, resurfaced as the organization's leader.⁴³ The radicals started to collect weapons and impose *Sharia* on locals without clan leaders' assent. Before long, Al-Itahad al-Islamiya had placed its own regional and town administrators in direct opposition to existing clan leadership. With the menace growing ever more foreboding, local leaders tried to negotiate with the Islamists, advising them to lay their weapons down and resume peaceful teaching duties instead. The militant group rejected the offer and killed some influential members of the clan-family to assert that they were serious. During the negotiations, clan leaders encountered Islamists' logic and reasoning were beyond their comprehension, because their rivals sincerely believed that they did not have any ulterior motives except God's work on earth and to apply His words to all people and society.

⁴² Andre Le Sage, Prospects for Al Itihad & Islamist Radicalism in Somalia. (*Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 28, No. 89, Taylor & Francis, 2001), 473

⁴³ Chris Tomlinson. "Target of Somalia air strike was one of the FBI's most wanted." *The Independent*. 9 January, 2007.

A long debate ensued as the southern Somali clan base sought an appropriate course of action. Mareehaan - Darood warlord Omar Haji Mohamed, former Defense Minister helped steer the discussion toward Ethiopia. It was decided to seek military assistance. Now Sheikh Aweys made another mistake by operating outside of his Hawiye clan's territory. Combined Ethiopian and native forces proceeded to defeat the Islamists in the Gedo region. Al-Itahad al-Islamiya was essentially nullified as a threat to southern Somalia. Twice-defeated, Aweys and the remnants of his militia retreated to Mogadishu, where his Hawiye clan dominates. It could no longer wage war against any clan militia near the Somali-Ethiopian border.

The Islamists were neutralized, but all was not well. Old problems continued to afflict Somalia. As before, warlords fought one another for territory, and United States maintained its distance from the Somali people, who had suffered a decade of senseless war and drought which had forced many into refugee camps inside and outside of the country. Somalia was no longer a country, in truth. It was split into mini-states controlled by clan leaders concerned far more with their fiefdoms than national unity government. Puntland was established as an autonomous region in the northeast, while the northwest proclaimed its independence as the Somaliland Republic. The south remained lawless and violent. The region's deprivation enabled Islamic clerics to make a comeback as bearers of order and peace. Indeed, the creation of a new Islamic court system made good on its promise. The clerics brought some justice to Mogadishu. They addressed many tough issues, including real estate and other civil disputes around which

clan warfare had revolved. Mogadishu, at least, saw a drop in clan feuds and criminal activities.⁴⁴ As a result of this, the Hawiye clan-family, which had suffered greatly at the hands of warlords, grew to support the Islamic clerics as a possible check to harmful warlords' influence within the clan-family. The clerics' potential for stabilization was apparent, insofar as their main goal was to advance and protect the interests of the tribe. Unfortunately, Islamic extremism has shown again and again that this is too much to hope for. While Islamic clerics committed themselves to community service and fair judgment by law, they had bigger agenda than their own local clan in mind: to introduce *Sharia* and to rule first Mogadishu and then all of Somalia by Islamic law. With the full support of their clan-family and its leaders, the clerics had an opportunity to organize former Al-Itihad al-Islamiya members and sympathizers into a court militia, charged with enforcing rulings and arrest runaway criminals. The arming of the court gave it enormous autonomy and justification, bordering on martial law. In 2006, Islamic clerics and businesspeople progressed further in forming a new political organization called the Islamic Court Union (ICU) to unite all smaller Islamic groups. Electing 90 assembly members helped legitimize the Islamist interest. As president, they elected none other than former Al-Itihad al-Islamiya leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys. Aweys had twice failed in efforts to Islamize large chunks of Somalia. Now, with a political apparatus and established court behind him, he once again pushed into the south.

Since Somalia was classified as failed state and had lost its territorial integrity soon after the collapse of central government fifteen years earlier, the Bush administration

⁴⁴ D. Ignatius, "Ethiopia's Iraq. Washington Post," 13 May 2007 , sec. B07

overreacted to this new development by employing warlords to fight an American proxy war under the heading of the War on Terrorism. Bush declared Somalia a potential “haven of terrorism”; there was, in truth, a precedent to back this opinion. Al-Qaeda and non-state actors favor a lawless and anarchic environment where they can conduct training, operate their financial and communication networks, and plan targets relatively freely. In Somalia as well as Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda recruited from the local population and preached openly its opportunistic “destroy-and-kill” philosophy. The indoctrination and manipulation of young, disenchanting Muslim men has been an effective strategy. Peace-loving people around the world have been materially and morally robbed – too often of life itself. Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda deserves the greatest condemnation for its barbaric actions and needs to be eliminated as an entity by any means possible. However, it remains the case that Somalia is not the same situation as Afghanistan. Here again, as with Iraq, the Bush administration automatically associated trouble and unfavorable circumstances in a Muslim country with al-Qaeda and terrorism. The U.S. branded the ICU without learning about the complex relationships between Islamic clerics within the ICU organization. In reality the organization, like Islam itself, is very multifaceted. Besides the different factions loyal to specific ethnic groups, ICU militants and clerics pursued and advocated different varieties of Islam. These include but are not limited to traditionalist, Brotherhood, Salafist, Islamist, and Jihadist Muslim. Washington missed a great opportunity to recognize these differences and choose its words, actions, and judgments accordingly. By branding the entire ICU as “terrorist,” the U.S. alienated

Somali Muslims in general and forged a much greater enemy in the process.⁴⁵

Thus, unwelcome American incursion only helped to encourage the ICU's rise to power.

Three factors behind its rise were:

- 1.) Violent turmoil and lawlessness which killed many Somalis and denied many more the right and ability to work and feed themselves.
- 2) Lack of international support in addressing the need for national reconciliation in forming an inclusive, credible government.
- 3) The United States and its Ethiopia ally rushing to judgment in characterizing all devoted Somali Muslims as radical Jihadists in need of destruction.

Washington, in failing to understand the importance of the above issues, missed an opportunity to better its international image and Somalia. Addressing the ICU with care – via diplomacy and international consensus building – might have gone a long way in easing the United States' reputation for stereotyping and not quite trying to understand Muslims (or worse, being their enemy). The Islamic world and Africa might have been well-involved in a concerted effort to stabilize Somali. Instead, the U.S. went the route of facilitating more war in a war-torn nation. By financing Ethiopia and Somali warlords in their fight against the Islamists, Washington was perceived by Somalis not as the solution, but part of the problem. In fact, the underhanded maneuvering of Kenyan-based CIA operatives made the extremists more popular, boosting their image as righteous

⁴⁵ Anna Shoup, "U.S. Involvement in Somalia"; available from www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/africa/somalia/usinvolvementinsomalia; Internet; access 24 November 2008

warriors among radicals and traditionalists alike. It is probably not coincidental, therefore, that before Mogadishu fell into the hands of the ICU and imposed a strict interpretation of *Sharia* law. Washington was alarmed; it would seem that Somalia had acquired its own Taliban.⁴⁶

Somali expert and associate professor of political science at Davidson College in North Carolina, Ken Menkhaus, lamented the consequences of the turn in U.S. Somali policy: “This is worse than the worst-case scenarios – the exact opposite of what the US government strategy, if there was one, would have wanted”.⁴⁷ Washington, in many ways, made its own bed; now it will have to lie in it. It had paid little attention to a decade-long humanitarian crisis, anarchy, and lawlessness. To this day, the U.S. State Department Bureau of African Affairs webpage does not even include Somalia as a trouble spot in sub-Saharan Africa in need of help and attention. In short, the U.S. has no inherent political and economic interest in Somalia which requires it to intervene for peace and stability. However, as the second Islamic radicalism comes to the fore, the U.S. shifts its policy and pursues a quick-fix marred war and a further exacerbation of the crisis. All of this begs a very good question: Is the United States really involved in Somalia for Somalia’s sake, or for its own?

The United States’ dilemma grew and contracted some additional urgency when Al-Itahad al-Islamiya leader Sheikh Aweys took control the ICU organization. Naturally, Al-Itahad al-Islamiya was added to the list of al-Qaeda-linked terrorist organizations.

⁴⁶ Burkheman, O. (2006, June 10). Fall of Mogadishu Leaves U.S. Policy in Ruins. *Guardian*, pp.A4

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp.A5

The Ethiopian government had accused Aweys' group of involvement in a series of bombing in Ethiopia. During a congressional hearing, Jendayi Frazer, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, told lawmakers that the U.S. would monitor the situation and coordinate a response through a new body called the Contact Group. The Contact Group consists of the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), United States, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Tanzania, and others. Frazer explained the ICU takeover of Mogadishu and other southern towns as an extension of al-Qaeda operations: "The U.S. government remains deeply troubled by the foreign-born terrorists who have found safe haven in Somalia in recent years."⁴⁸

The U.S. drafted a U.N. resolution that authorized the African Union (AU) to intervene in Somalia and asked the international community to finance this effort. On December 6, 2006, the Security Council passed resolution number 1725. Predictably, the Ethiopian army, with complicit U.S. backing, rushed in to protect the United Nations-sponsored Transitional Federal Government (TFG), based in Baidoa, a small town in the Northwestern Bay region.

Thus, the U.S. and its Ethiopian ally decided to resolve this Somali crisis by force. Their ICU rival responded with an ultimatum demanding the departure of the Ethiopian troops from Somalia within seven days; failure to do so would result in a holy war against the Ethiopian government. Predictably, these demands were not met. On December 20, 2006, a full-scale war broke out between the Ethiopian army and ICU militants near

⁴⁸ Council on Foreign Relations (2007, August, 22). Ethiopia – Eritrea Conflict Fueling Somalia Crisis. Retrieved November 24, 2008, Retrieved from <http://cfr/publication /14074/lyons.html>

Baidoa, the temporary TFG administrative center. The ICU was defeated within a couple of weeks, as Ethiopian professionalism overwhelmed the essentially amateur rebel militia.⁴⁹ The ICU still did not fall back on its promise, however. Its leadership and forces retreated to different parts of the country, where they resumed their “holy war” via guerilla tactics. This Iraqi-style insurgency was most significant in Mogadishu.

Ethiopia was the United States’ most important East African ally in the fight against international Islamic terrorism. America’s purpose is relatively clear, but what was Ethiopia’s motive? One can be certain that there was more to its interest in Somalia than mere terrorism. Here the past may enlighten the future.

The Role of Ethiopia in Somalia

Ethiopia has always had a political and strategic interest in Somalia and would never remain indifferent or oblivious to any crisis in Somalia. Geographically, whatever happens in Somalia invariably affects Ethiopia and other neighboring countries. The relationship between the two nations has been tense over the centuries. The boiling point, however, is rather recent. Specifically, the 19th century hosted Ethiopian annexation of ethnic Oromos and Somali territories. During this period, Emperor Menelik II not only defended Ethiopia against European colonies, but also competed with them for Somali-inhabited territories which he argued to be legitimately Ethiopian. By the turn of the 20th century, Somali was divided into British, French, Italian, and Ethiopian (the Ogaden)

⁴⁹ J. McLure, “Meles Zenawi: An Important All.” News Week, 21 April 2008. Retrieved November 24, 2008, from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/131703>

Somaliland, and what later to be named the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya. It is important to note that all Somalis share the same language, culture, religion and blood.⁵⁰ In fact, Somalis form one of the most homogeneous peoples in Africa. As mentioned, Sayyid Mohammad Abdille Hasan and his army formed a guerilla defense against both British and Ethiopian authorities. However, the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia did not start in earnest until the 20th century. For instance, King of Negash Yeshak (1414 – 1429) of Ethiopia stated in one of his victory songs about the defeated Somali groups in the Islamic Sultanate of Aden, Northern Somalia.⁵¹

Somalis form one people, but it took a long time for them to form one nation. In fact, the first time that all Somali ethnic territories united was in the 1930s, when Italian premier Benito Mussolini's armies invaded Ethiopia, ousted Emperor Haile Selassie, and conquered British Somaliland. Italian occupation lasted only one year (1940-41). This is because, for the first time in forty years, Somali clan families united and forgot the artificial boundaries drawn by Anglo, Italian, and Ethiopian occupiers.⁵² However, the British quickly reaped the rewards of Italy's botched East African colonial experiment. They retook lost territory from the Italian army, reoccupied northern Somalia, and restored Emperor Haile Selassie to his throne. Then they went further, taking the opportunity to impose military administration in southern Somalia and the Ogaden.⁵³

⁵⁰ Braine, 436

⁵¹ Ali Jimale Ahmed, ed. *The Invention of Somalia* (NJ.: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 82.

⁵² I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*. (London: Westview Press, 1988), 116

⁵³ Ogaden region is the home of Somali ethnic group and the purpose was named Ogaden in this region (Ogaden is one of the Somali clan families) was to create division and conflict within the Somali tribes in this territory.

After intense pressure from Haile Selasie, the British gave the Ogaden back to Ethiopian jurisdiction but retained their position in the south.

Initially, Washington decided not to get involved in European imperial maneuvering in Africa, but the Italian invasion of Ethiopia challenged Washington's neutral position. The United States refused to recognize the Italian conquest and imposed an embargo on its government.⁵⁴ This new, more vocal policy gave Ethiopia's exiled Emperor Haile Selasie the chance to forge a new relationship with the U.S.

Washington announced a plan to provide economic aid to Ethiopia and help train the Ethiopian army. In return, the U.S. fleet was granted the right to continue utilizing an existing military facility in the former Italian colony of Eritrea. This mutual relationship provided Ethiopia with approximately \$5 million in military aid and forgave most of its debt, reducing it from \$5 million to \$200,000.⁵⁵ Other benefits included formal military training and the full equipment of 1,000 enlisted men and officers.⁵⁶ Essentially, all of this amounted to a trade of what either party could provide for what it needed: arms to Ethiopia and a regional base for the United States.⁵⁷

Haile Selasie's military buildup was not a random or unprovoked movement; it had very practical roots to the east in neighboring Somalia, which remained unhappily colonized after the World War II. Selasie warned that Somalis were not only Muslims, but

⁵⁴ Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, *Armies for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia 1953 – 1991* (University of Pittsburgh, 1991), 67

⁵⁵ Lefebvre, 68

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 69

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 74

communist sympathizers. He preyed on America's fears to lure its interest and aid. Emperor Selasie was a skillful statesman politician who understood world politics in terms of balance of power and competition between the U.S. and Soviet Union. He played them well against each other. For instance, he convinced the U.S. administration under President Henry Truman in 1948 that U.S. security interests would be best served if the Italian colony in Eritrea be absorbed into Ethiopia.⁵⁸ The reason that the U.S. rejected the Italian trusteeship in Eritrea was that the Italian government was weakened and unstable; therefore, it was easily susceptible to communist and Soviet interference. This formula having worked, the Emperor wasted no time in portraying Somalia (still under the British protectorate) the same way, and vigorously pushed Washington, Britain, and the United Nations to yield the Haud and Reserve area, part of the Ogaden region, to the Ethiopian crown.⁵⁹ The Eisenhower administration was receptive. Catering to Selasie's concerns – real or contrived – was a means to a greater end: the Cold War, and the acquisition of Ethiopia as an ally against any potential communist enemy in the region.

Emperor Selasie rekindled and reinforced the animosity between Somalia and Ethiopia largely as an act of Cold War opportunism.⁶⁰ With American support, his geopolitical ambition of being the relative “superpower” in the region was fulfilled. Then, in 1960, Somalia earned its independence. Understandably, the young nation's first priority was to acquire military hardware from different sources in order to defend itself from

⁵⁸ Lefebvre, 66

⁵⁹ Somalia's interest was always to incorporate the Somali – inhabited Ogaden region of Ethiopia into a Greater Somali.

⁶⁰ Fred Halliday, US Policy in the Horn of Africa: Aboulia or Proxy Intervention (*Review of African Political Economy*, No. 10 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Sep. - Dec., 1977), 10

Ethiopian domination in the region. The rival Horn nations' simultaneous militarization caused two wars, in 1964 and 1977. Thus, Ethiopia and Somalia spent billions of dollars and engaged in costly conflicts while millions of their people died of famine and starvation or were forced into neighboring countries, North America, and Europe as refugees. Indeed, the entire region suffered. Both countries' per capita GDP was less than \$300. Both neglected the benefit of health and education services for their citizens; rather, they diverted their nation's resources and foreign aid to their war machines, purchasing sophisticated weapons for use against each other's people. Somalia's standing army increased from 16,000 in 1960s to 54,000 in 1976. Ethiopia was not much better equipped for war. Over the same period, Ethiopia managed with its 40,000-45,000 man army, navy, and air force. This was, however, before the Marxist-Leninist Mengistu Haile Mariam regime (1975-91), when the army hit 300,000.⁶¹ As it turns out, the jostling of the Eisenhower years and 60s was but a prelude. Ethiopia has imported well over \$10 billion worth of arms since World War II, but more than 95 percent of this has come from the Soviet Union after the 1977 Somali-Ethiopian war.

Somalia started the senseless war of 1977, responsible for thousands of innocent lives lost and the proliferation of refugees. This conflict was essentially an act of idealism. Specifically, the Siad Barre government sought to incorporate the Somali inhabited Ogaden region, controlled by Ethiopia, into a Greater Somalia. Somalia, as a Soviet Union client during the Cold War, accumulated over \$2 billion dollars worth of sophisticated weapons thanks to the Eastern bloc. As result, while the Somali National

⁶¹ Reported in David Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States and Soviet Union* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 32

Army (SNA) was outnumbered by Ethiopian forces by as many as 35,000 men, it had three times the tank forces and a larger air force.

Somalia's Soviet relationship essentially contradicted history. Ethiopia had typically enjoyed geopolitical dominance in the Horn of Africa. Now, for the first time, the balance of power tilted toward Somalia. Thanks to Cold War superpower maneuvering, Ethiopia grew weaker while Somalia found substantial military strength. However, Siad Barre miscalculated the balance of power between the Soviet Union and United States of America when he attempted to take advantage of Ethiopia's political instability. Ethiopia encountered hard times when long-standing Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by the Derg (military council), resulting in political turmoil and a battle for ultimate supremacy over the ruling junta. Some elements of Somali society took advantage of this distraction to pursue their own ends. Most notable were the Somalis of the Ogaden, overwhelmingly frustrated with what they saw as foreign rule. A group called the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) materialized to bear their flag. The rebels engaged Ethiopia in an armed struggle for the end of colonialism and reunion with the Somali nation, which aided the cause.⁶²

The Soviet Union, with close ties to the Siad Barre government, observed the development of this conflict with interest. As important as what was happening between Somalia and Ethiopia was the internal struggle within the Ethiopian Derg. Its result

⁶² I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*, 4th ed., (London: Westview Press, 1980), 243

would change the region again. Mengistu Haile Marian maneuvered his way to supremacy over the Derg. He was proclaimed head of state in February 1977. Thus, the Soviet Union secured another client in the Horn of Africa as the new leader's Marxist-Leninist orientation became clear. Mengistu courted the Soviets symbolically, ordering the United States out of Ethiopia by April 1977.⁶³ For Somalia, the mathematics of this arrangement were precarious. If Somalia and Ethiopia were enemies, the Soviet Union could not reasonably support both. Logically, it would choose the stronger.

With Mengistu's rise, the U.S. lost Ethiopia to the Soviet Union. However, Ethiopia and the Soviet Union's shift opened a new opportunity for American strategic interest in East Africa. It started when Siad Barre decided to make a decisive military campaign by invading the Ogaden region in July 13, 1977. The Soviet Union, seeking the best foothold possible in the region, made every effort to work out some sort of Somali-Ethiopian ceasefire. With the war escalating, the Soviet Union was still supplying both sides while trying to convince Siad Barre to withdraw his forces and accept a peaceful resolution to the crisis. This effort failed.⁶⁴ Siad Barre was more interested in Somali hegemony than Soviet assistance; the latter had been but a means to an end. Now the Soviet path was clear. The communist superpower abandoned Somalia and shifted all aid and support to Ethiopia. The shift came at a critical time in the Somali-Ethiopian war. Almost 60 percent of Ogaden region was behind Somali lines, including the strategic location of Gode on the Shabelle River. Having already alienated Somalia, the stakes were high for

⁶³ I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*, 4th ed., (London: Westview Press, 1980), 233

⁶⁴ Robert D. Kaplan, *Surrender or Starve: The War Behind the Famine* (London: Westview Press, 1988), 154

the Soviet Union. If Somali success continued and the Marxists were brought to humility, it would be left empty-handed in East Africa. Accordingly, the USSR rushed to Ethiopia's support before the new Marxist regime collapsed. It flooded the nation with military advisors while Cuba supplied 15,000 combat troops.⁶⁵ Military aid was virtually unlimited, second only to that provided to Syria during the Yom Kippur war. Other countries made similar contributions to the cause of stopping Siad Barre, including North Korea, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, and East Germany.⁶⁶ Siad Barre had no future with the Soviet Union and wasted no time in expelling Soviet remnants from Somalia and severing diplomatic relations.

The cost of this war was enormous in lives and resources for two of the world's poorer countries. The Ethiopian government managed to quickly recruit a roughly 100,000-strong militia to integrate into its regular fighting force, while Somalia itself raised 80,000 for the advancement of its attacks toward the gates of Jigjiga and Harar.⁶⁷ Somalia, however, was not able to push its advantage. Things were beginning to shift due to heavy losses in tank battalions, persistent and precise Ethiopian attacks upon supply routes, and the difficulty of moving equipment during the rainy season. It was an unwise war from the start. Siad Barre was beginning to sense its consequences. His army could no longer defend Jigjiga after heavy losses stole 3,000 men from its garrison. Columns of Ethiopian and Cuban troops managed to bypass the front lines and cut the supply line, essentially encircling the enemy. This strategic strangulation forced Siad

⁶⁵ Metz, 183

⁶⁶ Wiberg, H., *The Horn of Africa*. *Journal of Peace Research*: Vol. 16, No. 3. (Saga Publications, 1979), 191.

⁶⁷ Lewis, 1980: 234

Barre to retreat. The situation soon spilled over into other Ogaden towns. On March 9, 1978, after a whirlwind of Ethiopian success facilitated by timely communist intervention, the Somali National Army left the Ogaden altogether. They were defeated, humiliated, and decimated. Almost one-third of the regular Somali soldiers were killed or captured by Ethiopian the army.

The remnants of the defeated Somali invading force brought home not only low morale, but frustration and resentment against Siad Barre's government for its miscalculations. As a result, a group of disgruntled soldiers mutinied in an attempt to overthrow their leader. Their rebellion was put down in May 1978. Nineteen of the coup leaders were sentenced to death by firing squad.

Their leader, Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, narrowly escaped to Ethiopia before being captured.⁶⁸ Notably, all but one of the leaders came from the clan-family Majeerteen Darood (Siad Barre himself was of Darood lineage). The Majeerteen clan had been a fixture in Somali politics before Siad Barre seized power in 1969 and held many prominent positions up to his rule. They had filled the president and prime minister positions during the democratic period of 1960s; additionally, it had dominated high positions in the military and civil service. As soon as Siad Barre took power, the

⁶⁸ Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed was a division commander in Ethiopia's Bale and Sidamo regions during the war between the two countries. After the retreat back into Somalia, he organized the coup to overthrow Siad Barre. Colonel Ahmed failed to gain Ethiopian support, however. His effort failed. He spent six years in Ethiopian prison failing to lead his opposition group, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) to victory over the Somali National Army. Colonel Ahmed returned to become a warlord as soon as Siad Barre's regime collapsed in pursuit of his dream of becoming Somali president. He initially succeeded in by establishing a semi-autonomous regional state, Puntiland, in 1988. However, Mr. Ahmed's dreams came true when, after two years of negotiation and national reconciliation organized by the United Nations in Kenya, he was elected to a five-year term as president of a transitional federal government (TFG) in 2004,

Majeerteen clan lost all of this. The dictator usurped its place of privilege and importance in the Somali society, and its prominent politicians were incarcerated indefinitely. The attempted overthrow, then, was not a voice of objection to the war so much as an effort to take advantage of the general discontent and reclaim lost significance. Unfortunately, they risked their careers in pursuit of clan primacy. Those who faced the firing squad risked – and lost – their lives as well.

There was one very important instigator left unscathed. The surviving leader of the coup, Colonel Ahmed, kept his clan-family's dream at the expense of his nation by acting as an agent and tool of the Ethiopian government in destabilizing his homeland. Somalia's archenemy helped him form the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). This new insurgent organization was mostly populated by angry Majeerteen clan members. The execution of the failed coup organizers bestowed a certain martyrdom upon their cause. The inevitable conflict began to materialize with Siad Barre responding with his own support of various rival insurgencies: the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).⁶⁹

Behind the scenes, the Cold War fueled this new, less direct manifestation of the Ethiopia-Somali feud. Naturally, when the Soviet Union dropped Somalia, the United

⁶⁹ The WSLF is no longer an effective insurgent movement, having been replaced by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which is currently actively fighting for separation from Ethiopia. The EPLF was successful. Eritrea was recognized as an independent state in 1993. The TPLF succeeded in toppling Mengistu Haile Marian's regime in Spring 1991, transforming it from an insurgency to a ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), with Meles Zenawi serving as Prime Minister of Ethiopia. The OLF divided into two groups, with one joining the ruling coalition and another still seeking for separation from Ethiopia.

States picked it up. Thus, once enabled by the Soviet Union, the 80s saw Siad Barre become an American client. Realism forced him to be; American support equaled defense from the Ethiopian war machine. Again, the superpower only asked for the use of Somali bases. Rivals until the end, both Siad Barre and Mengistu Haile Marian had one thing in common: the ambition for power at any cost. They would kill and starve civilians for their own ends. They could get away with it, too, because both received unconditional support from their respective Cold War benefactors. Rather than help to stabilize East Africa, the United States and Soviet Union compromised their supposedly egalitarian and humane value systems in enabling its degeneration into war, chaos, and murder. The moral compass pointed nowhere when there was an opportunity to thwart the other's strategic ambitions. The tension between the two countries intensified when Somalia failed and warlords replaced the central government. Clan leaders competed against each other for Ethiopian support, running the country and its people into the ground over fiefdoms and bits of land. Meles Zenawi came to power in Ethiopia in 1991. He too had little concern for starvation, feudalism, or any other troubles facing the Somali people. He facilitated the instability in Somalia in order to reduce its threat which may spill over to Somali-inhabitant region in Ogaden. It must be understood that Ethiopia is fragile and its survival depends on the political situation in its neighboring countries including Somalia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan. Somalia has been the primary threat for Ethiopia in centuries and Meles Zenawi always will look out any political outcome of Somalia.

The U.S. shifted its foreign policy after the Soviet Union imploded in the early 1990s. The 1993 humanitarian crisis convinced the United States that Somalia was not really worth its resources anymore. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks restored American interest in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia was a logical strategic ally because of its location and shared concern over Somalia's Islamic Union Court (ICU). While the United States linked the ICU to Al-Qaeda, Ethiopia found its hand in national liberation insurgencies such as the Oromo Liberation Front, Ogaden National Liberation Front, and most importantly, Eritrea.

The Tigray People's Liberation Front, led by Meles Zenawi, and Isaias Afwerki's Eritrean People's Liberation Front cooperated very closely to bring down the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime in 1991. This was a means to an end; each wanted land. Thus, Eritrea and Ethiopia quickly became bitter enemies hereafter. Two wars between 1998 and 2000 claimed an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 lives and displaced millions, according to Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, D.C.⁷⁰

Given the complex history of violence in the region, the United States did not need to convince the Ethiopian government to wage a war against the ICU in Somalia. It is naïve to think that Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in December 2006 was out of pure moral alliance with the United States, or a puppet attack. Somalia had invaded Ethiopia over land before. What would prevent it from doing so again? Meles Zenawi saw the ICU as a serious threat that required a fierce military response. Civilians caught up in the

⁷⁰ Terrence Lyons, *Avoiding Conflict in the Horn of Africa: U.S. Policy Toward Ethiopia and Eritrea*, CSR NO. 21, (Council on Foreign Relations, December 2006), 7

ensuing violence were displaced in large numbers, particularly in Mogadishu (see Figure 5).



FIGURE 5

Ethiopian Troops Patrolling Outskirts of Mogadishu⁷¹

⁷¹ This photo of Ethiopian Troops was retrieved from http://wardheernews.com/Editorial/editorial_42.html

Conflicts within Somali Government

U.S. policy toward Somalia has been shifting back and forth with its changing security and strategic interests. During Cold War, Somalia and the Horn region ranked as one of the most important strategic locations. Consequently, the U.S. turned a blind eye to inhumanity and provided economic and military aid to one of the most notorious dictators in Africa, General Siad Barre. As soon as the Cold War ended with American victory, the U.S. – with no superpower rival – had no need for Somalia and accordingly suspended its aid package. This was not the right time to end Somali's dependence on U.S. foreign aid, with the country on the verge of civil war and starting to debate a political transformation that would revise the old constitution based on a one-party system.

Although Siad Barre successfully crushed two previous insurgent organizations (SNM and SSDF), the United Somali Congress (USC), formed in 1989, succeeded to topple the dictator already weakened and losing the support of his people as well as financial assistance from the U.S. and European countries. Corruption and abuse of power by government bureaucrats and military officers emerged as an epidemic, uncontrollable problem. Everything was on sale including military hardware for the rebels. This demoralized the army, the core of which quickly crumbled as the USC approached the capital. Siad Barre and his immediate family had no other choice but to flee his

hometown in the Gedo region. In January 1991, Siad Barre's twenty-one-year rule ended. The USC, composed of militants from the Hawiye clan-family, replaced him. The insurgents, however, did not bring law and order by taking Mogadishu. With Barre gone, they lacked discipline and a sense of purpose. The leaders were confused as to what their priorities should be. On one hand, they wanted to seize power; on the other hand, they wanted revenge against one of the major Somali clans, the Darood. One thing that they did not care so much about was protecting the weak and vulnerable people of the capital. Indeed, the USC furthered their misery. Instead of peace, they pursued revenge and ethnic cleansing against the innocent Darood clan family, not because of immediate need, but historic animosity between the Hawiye and Darood tribes.⁷² Sadly, when the USC stormed in the capital, they provided protection only for those former government officials belonging to the Hawiye clan-family, regardless of what crimes they had taken part in. For instance, the new regime exempted Siad Barre's vice president, interior minister and finance minister from prosecution. However, Darood members left behind in the capital became victims of genocide. This genocide was neither mentioned in the American media nor addressed by U.S. policy makers in the George H.W. Bush administration.

It is wayward to place exclusive blame on the U.S. for the fall of central government in Somalia because it withheld financial aid to Somalia. Other factors contributed to the collapse of Siad Barre's regime. It has already been explored how this nomadic society fought amongst its own segments for domination over territory and grazing land for

⁷² Siad Barre belongs to Darood and committed atrocities against Hawiye tribe. But also, he never cares his own tribe as well: he prosecuted Majeereen clan family who belong to Said Barre's Darood clan.

centuries. In the 20th century, this competition morphed into a more politicized contest for government influence. This has been particularly pronounced since statehood in 1960, when a society that has always been divided was abruptly expected to work harmoniously. It is no surprise that Somalia has failed as a state. It cannot overcome a clan system that undermines the importance of a unity government that works for the interest of all people, not one particular sector. Before nationhood, European colonial powers provided Somalia with a certain level of education in Western political philosophy. In doing so, colonies successfully brought old nemeses together under one flag and government. This concept was essential to urban development, as people of different clan-families moved to towns and cities where they learned to live together. Yet, this was a precarious arrangement. People did not give up loyalty to their tribes. This promised trouble for Somalia once the colonial umbrella was closed. However, it worked for the imperial powers for the time being for a number of reasons. First, the colonies could divide old rival clan-families in order to rule them more easily (divide and conquer). Secondly, colonies brought bigger guns and created security forces capable of enforcing rules and ordinances. Finally, they were able to provide a stick and carrot incentive to major clans: stay loyal and earn the favor of the powers that be. If any particular clan family expressed opposition to colonial authorities and took up arms, other rival clans would rush in to stop the revolt in order to curry favor.

European colonies naturally favored the tribes that proved their loyalty. These were offered a place in government civil service and law enforcement. These occupations come with a level of privilege and authority that some tribes enjoyed exclusively for

years. Additionally, this new opportunity lured many nomads to move into urban areas to seek administrative employment. Most importantly, when European imperialist decided to give up their colonies in Somalia, they rewarded top leadership positions to the tribes and individuals closest to them. For instance, in the Northern colony of British Somaliland, the Isaaq tribe was awarded virtually all of the best jobs for its collaboration with the imperialists. In the South, the Italian colony found similar willingness in two loyal tribes: the Majeerteen of the Darood clan and the Mudulod, sub-clan of the Hawiye. These two southern tribes helped the Italians without reservation. In return, Italian and British colonies enabled these clans to claim some superiority over the other clans in terms of wealth, scholarship for their children in London and Rome, and future government influence in the post-decolonial era. Naturally, when the Somali government was formed, most parliamentary seats went to those tribes that had been loyal to the colonial rulers, as they were seen as best suited to stability. Somalia's first president, Adan Abdulle Osman, is a prime example. He was a former civil servant under the Italians as a member of the Mudulod, Hawiye sub-clan. On the other hand, his prime minister, Italian-educated Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, came from the other favorite tribe, the Majeerteen of the Darood clan. This arrangement did not change until the election of 1968, when the Somali parliament elected Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke as the second president of the country. He selected as his prime minister English-educated Mohamad Ibrahim Egal from the Isaaq clan of the former British Somaliland.

While most colonial privileges went to certain tribes, they never quite recognized the importance of the state. They prioritized instead traditional clan loyalties; they never

learned to see themselves as part of a nation. The clan system, of course, could not be assigned a predominant place in a modern European-style state.⁷³ It was not easy to reconcile the two cultures. The Somali people are not to blame; they merely had a different system – one that could sustain itself in a vacuum. To be fair, European colonialism gave them much to learn and internalize in a short time. Not only did they introduce one central, federal authority to the nomadic people in Somalia; they promoted a system of government based on the multi-party democratic system. This was totally foreign to the Somali pastoralist society; furthermore, the colonial epoch was not nearly long enough for them to learn it. The new “one size fits all” political system never matched Somali’s anarchist culture. With new borders drawn, however, and the old system compromised, it was the only way for Somalia to function. Somalia was branded with a political philosophy. It never had a chance to develop a brand of democracy that supports different political views and reflects clan-family values and beliefs.

There were no competing ideas and views in Somali nomadic society because clan-families had much in common. The main differences were in lineage and location. They shared the same culture, language and religion, and lived with perpetual conflict, sometimes caused irrefutable disruption. War is part of Somali culture; so too is working together. The harsh Somali environment in which Somalis live requires clan alliance as a rule of existence. The political maneuvering of any tribe depends not on how well they compromise, but what kind of coalition they put together in order to keep and retake territory and camels.

⁷³ Metz, 164

The reason that Somalis fight over camels is because the camel represents wealth in a nomadic culture. It is the only livestock able to endure the harsh, hot, and dry environment successfully, while providing unlimited milk and, if needed, meat for pastoral communities. In addition, the camel is a durable means of transport across the rugged terrain. It is intelligent, able to follow verbal commands such as “sit down” and “stand up” (see Figure 6). All of this makes the camel an important part of the Somali nomadic tradition. Not only does it represent a wealth, but tremendous power and prestige. Thus, the camel is one of the main reasons that conflict and competition among the tribes has taken many forms, from small raids to outright war. Often camels would die along with humans in the process. On the other hand, camels were sometimes used for more benign purposes: it was Somali tradition to pay and receive camel blood as compensation in the event of homicide, injury, and other criminal offenses.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Samatar, 47



FIGURE 6

Somali Woman Loading Camel's Pack⁷⁵. Courtesy Corbis

Historically, Somali culture is not based upon compromise. It sanctions a “winner take all” mentality that has become part of its current political practices, meaning less more aggression and show of force to prove a point. It must be understood that Somalia has no concept of minority protection in the political process. This means that majority tribes dominate every decision and ignore smaller voices.⁷⁶ The United States is not much different, in truth. One sees different names but the same method in its political system, only political parties and candidates replace the clan-family. It does not matter the

⁷⁵ Kevin Flemin/Corbis, Somali Woman Loading Camel's Pack photo. Retrieved from <http://pro.corbis.com/search/Enlargement.aspx?>

⁷⁶ Andrzejewski, B., Pastoralism and Politics among the Somali. *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Cambridge University Press, 1962), 517

margin of victory, the person with the most votes takes everything. The best example is the election of 2000 between Al Gore and George W. Bush. One state – Florida – decided the presidency by 537 votes.⁷⁷ George W. Bush was declared the 43th president; Al Gore won nothing, not even consolation. This is the peculiar example set by the shining light of world democracy.

The Somali version translates the American electoral system to the clan tradition. Basically, bigger clans are enabled to dominate smaller ones. After independence, the Somali government tried to emulate the Western political and economic system by implementing democracy and capitalism. This was judged to be the best way to attract essential economic aid into which Somali's young nation could root itself. However, decolonization had been a poor, hasty process. Europeans left little in the way of economic infrastructure. They had been interested in resources, not the development of a real, self-sustaining economy.

The indigenous people of Somalia did not have the training or experience to build a working democracy. For that matter, they did not have the culture either. Tribalism and democracy did not work well together. Traditionally, Somalis had taken what they needed, fought for resources, and divided themselves. Not only did people misunderstand the state; they did not have the patience to live under one.

⁷⁷ Greg Palast, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy: The Truth about Corporate Cons, Globalization, and High- Finance Fraudsters*. (London: First Plume Printing, 2004), 33

Somalia's nomadic society continued to fight amongst itself, only now the prize was bigger than land and livestock. The new government provided a route to power. The various opportunist clan leaders began to feel that the way to prosperity was power in government. The colonial administration had excluded rather than incorporated the Somali people into the governmental process. Thus, it never taught the true spirit of democracy: that public service carries responsibilities as well as rights, and that everyone who participates in it represents these rights for all of the people – not just this or that tribe. People never learned that government belongs to all people and they, collectively, are the sovereign: the highest form of political authority with the most sacred responsibility to one another. Contrarily, in its nine years of free democracy, some tribes enjoyed all of the government privileges while the rest suffered injustice at the hands of the powers that were supposed to protect them.

For the nine years of civilian government (1960-1969), more than 80 political parties surged onto political scene, all but one (SYL), based on tribal lineage. Needless to say, no broad coalitions could be built on the basis of blood. The Somali Youth League (SYL) was the original political party and partly responsible for freedom and independence from Italian and British colonialism. But most political parties were formed to protect the interest of tribes rather than ideals which might have defined Somalia as a nation.

Corruption and nepotism were widespread problems in government. They were expected and even condoned. Tribalism was the main reason that corruption existed because it

undermined good governance by enabling unqualified people to claim critical positions because they had the right blood. This reinvigorated the historic hostility between clan families in a new “official” forum. Violence erupted in parliamentary elections, particularly in 1968 (the last free election). The election fell victim to fraud; so too did a number of people, who lost their lives in the violence.⁷⁸ Capitalism and Western-style democracy had effectively produced a hostile political reality. There was widespread discontent as to how bureaucrats embezzled and misappropriated the nation’s limited foreign aid, and how the security apparatus abused its authority in enabling them. The nation’s law enforcement and defense apparatus was especially disappointing. If two clans were to confront each other over livestock or territories, instead of helping settle the issues between the two clans peacefully, they always took sides and provided arms to one clan. Essentially, the peacekeepers facilitated war.

Change was badly needed in government. Sadly, however, the newly elected president became a victim of tribal vengeance when he was assassinated by a member of his security force over clan issues. This was not just the death of one president, but the entire democratic process. This is why, on October 21, 1969, the armed forces, led by General Siad Barre, overthrew the civilian regime and immediately nationalized all major private corporations, prohibited political parties, and shut down the parliament. Ironically, people welcomed this new government and its socialist policies which gave many people, regardless of their tribal affiliations, an opportunity to participate in the new regime as long as they had not been part of previous governments.

⁷⁸ G. Payton, The Somali Coup of 1969: The Case for Soviet Complicity. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 18, No. 3 (Cambridge University Press, Sept. 1980), 501

The Somali people had a reason for turning on democracy. It must be understood that the tribal society had experienced violence and bloodshed for centuries. People were willing to put their faith behind the new government in the hope that it could prevent unnecessary conflicts within clan families and work out a common and unbiased solution to Somalia's problems. Nine years of democracy had done little. People bought Siad Barre's "Scientific Socialism" battle against tribalism to be a true mark of progress, with one man's strength replacing everyone's voice as a means to change.

Siad Barre was willing to create third party enemies in Europe and Ethiopia in order to unite his people behind his regime. He portrayed himself as the father and savior of his people and nation. Then he contradicted himself, waging an unnecessary war against Ethiopia which depleted the country's funds and military apparatus. This war took its toll on Somalia and Siad Barre's regime. It puts the dictator in a very precarious position as to how to solidify his power and root out any threats without alienating his people. The regime survived largely because of its effective management of clan conflict. He discouraged tribal infighting and played an unbiased and neutral agent in resolving disputes. Any attempt to exploit or incite tribal violence was punished severely. In the forum of clan violence, the dictator's willingness to ignore democratic principle was perhaps the most effective route.

Conflict within Siad Barre's government was unearthed when a group of military officers (returning from the Ethiopia-Somalia war in 1978) launched coup d'état upon returning

to the capital. All nineteen officers minus one belonged to a single tribe: Majeerteen. Here, Siad Barre's precarious national unity started to crack. The Majeerteen tribe withdrew its support when his court found all of the perpetrators guilty and sentenced them to death. Many of the Majeerteen clan were forced to resign their government posts. Siad Barre had created an internal enemy. Some Majeerteen leaders found a willing ally to Somali instability in Ethiopia. Here they set up the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), headquartered in Addis Ababa.⁷⁹

The conflict between Siad Barre's government and the SSDF escalated until it had nailed shut the nationalist coffin. Siad Barre's propaganda and information establishments had monopolized the media with talk of one Somali nation, but now the old ways of tribalism had a safe haven and place to consolidate. Siad Barre faced a tough political challenge and had two choices: to solve the problem politically or turn to the military. He made the classic dictator's choice, deciding to put down the rebels by military means. Thus, he sold away any hope of peace. Furthermore, he was required to increase his defense force in order to deal with internal and Ethiopian threats, concentrated especially at the border areas between the two countries. In doing so, he recruited his tribesmen, Mareehaan, in the battle against the Majeerteen (both tribes belong to Darood). He instructed his defense minister to promote his tribesmen to the rank-and-file of the defense force in order to ensure loyalty. This is how Siad Barre betrayed his reputation and legacy. Once the consummate Somali nationalist, he was now another tribalist. The slippery slope had begun. Over time, the government fell into uncontrollable corruption and the country closer to civil war. Of course, it must be remembered that during this era, foreign

⁷⁹ Metz, 50

influence facilitated virtually everything that happened in the so-called “Third World.” The question becomes: Why did the United States help this failing government and provide it with the military aid to survive? Had it not already betrayed the American ideal?

The U.S. looked the other way because of the Cold War. It deliberately failed to scrutinize the Siad Barre government’s mismanagement of foreign aid and his human rights offenses. He was ruthless and surrounded himself with incompetent individuals whom he selected not so much for their qualifications as their loyalty to him and their tribes. In the mid 80s, Siad Barre was victim of a life-threatening car accident.⁸⁰ He suffered several broken bones and there was no emergency room in country that could provide him enough oxygen. He was forced to fly to Saudi Arabia for his medical care. Somali corruption was epidemic to the point where every government-owned, including hospitals, was no longer accountable and functioned entity per se. People lost faith in a government that did not appear terribly concerned with providing for them. The national army and police forces failed their responsibility to protect its citizens from widespread crime that often worked in broad daylight. The economy went sour amidst uncontrollable inflation and worthless salaries.⁸¹ The government’s solution exacerbated the problem: it kept printing more notes which further decreased the value of Somali currency. People could hardly afford their day to day needs; many lost all their savings to the inflation. In late 80s, the economy was terrible, security was neglected and tribalism was surging. Somalis were returning to the old way of living; the new way was not working. The tribe

⁸⁰ Jama Mohamed Ghalib, *The Cost of Dictatorship: The Somali Experience*, (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1995), 175

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 210

presented itself as the best source of sustenance in hard financial times. Traditionally, people had helped their tribesmen in times of crisis, protecting one another from hostile clan-families. Nationalism was not resonating. Somalia's leaders could no longer rule, for they had lost the mandate of the people. They lacked the experience, sophistication and vision to create a political system that reconciled the tribal way of life with the philosophy of democratic nationhood. Often they did not try particularly hard, yielding to their own arrogance rather than the needs of the people. These leaders were first to blame for the failure of Somali government which ultimately led the nation to chaos and collapse in 1991. It was hardly a great loss. In fact, it was the best thing that could have happened to the Somali people. However, when one considers what followed, Siad Barre's fall was another unfortunate page in an unfortunate epoch. With what was it to be replaced? Needless to say, this question was never adequately answered. Every leader who followed Siad Barre was neither better than him nor had better solutions for the crisis and turmoil that Somalia is still facing. During this time, these leaders had one commonality: they put their tribe first and country second.

Thus, the Somali nation ceased to exist as a viable modern state and returned to its tribal roots. Europe and the United States helped to create the nation but have made little effort to broker peace between the factions in order to reestablish Somalia. Somalia still remains a shambles.

In other words, the U.S. has saved many nations before they descended into full-blown civil war, including Ethiopia and Kenya, both of which experienced internal crises that

might have challenged their central governments. Typically a high level U.S. government official or envoy is appointed to negotiate such resolutions and guard against a vacuum of power and chaos that might threaten national sovereignty and integrity.

After almost 15 years of devastating civil war and many failed attempts at national reconciliation sponsored by neighboring and Arab states, the U.N. and U.S. finally had a breakthrough in 2004 after two years of negotiation and debate. The Kenyan and Ethiopian governments had vested interests and influence in Somalia; therefore, their support was key to the process. The two neighbors were successfully convinced Somali tribal leaders and warlords to join them at a Kenyan resort area to discuss a power-sharing agreement. As many people have admitted, the plan was basically uneven, with larger tribes enjoying the greatest allocation of seats in the new parliament. Representation in the new parliament was based on a 4.5 formula for the four major tribes (Dir, Darood, Hawiye, and Rahanween) and ½ for minority tribes. When a parliament was formed and elected a speaker, a transitional constitution was ratified. Abdullah Yusuf Ahmed became the first president of the new era in 2004.⁸² Ahmed made a strong statement for the new Somalia by choosing Ali Muhammad Ghedi of the Hawiye tribe to be his prime minister. As expected, factionalism prevailed in wider Somalia in spite of the government's efforts to discourage it. Several warlords were not happy with the selection of Mr. Ghedi or other cabinet appointments. Soon they withdrew their support for the new Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and threatened to deny it the right to function in the capital or any other city in the country. Since the TFG was formed in

⁸² Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, former warlord and SSDF leader who helped to topple former dictator Siad Barre.

Kenya, it took several months to select a new base. Finally, the government shifted to a small town called Jowhar, favorable to Ghedi for his tribal affiliations. Before the TFG moved out of Kenya, the parliament passed legislation granting neighboring countries, including Ethiopia, the right to part of the African peacekeeping mission in Somalia. Yusuf campaigned hard to pass this resolution because of his favorable relations with Ethiopia from the days of his rebel movement against Siad Barre and efforts to create a regional, semi-autonomous government in Puntiland. Ethiopian involvement in the Somali national reconciliation plan was obvious, with Yusuf being promoted as a potential ally in Somalia. This only increased suspicion as to the intentions of the Ethiopian government and its cozy relations with the newly elected president, who openly requested that the Ethiopian army protect his new government.

By the time the TFG moved back to the country, the speaker of the parliament had begun to break away from Yusuf's government because of a last-minute disagreement regarding relocation. Initially, the parliament voted to locate the TFG in the town of Baidao, the speaker's hometown. However, one of the town's warlords, not a TFG supporter, refused to guarantee its security. As a result, the new prime minister's hometown, Jowhar (90 kilometers from the capital) was chosen instead.

The conflict within the TFG continued. Some of the warlords holding cabinet positions resigned from the government. They did not want to give up their private enterprise, including the control of major airports and seaports. These warlords were still fundamentally attached to their tribes and felt threatened by the president since he

himself was a warlord who had been an obstacle to national reconciliation in the past. While the warlords' dispute escalated within Yusuf's government, the CIA and Ethiopian government arranged a clandestine operation in Somalia after September 11, 2001. Two of the main Mogadishu warlords, Mohamed Qanyare Afrah and Muse Sudi Yalahow, were paid by the CIA to capture or kill any suspected Al-Qaeda members in Somalia. This resulted in assassinations which threatened Islamic scholars and other devoted Muslims who either disappeared to the countryside or hired bodyguards to protect themselves.

The pressure grew to find a way to stop this manhunt and assassination culture. The Islamic Court Union (ICU) was one of the main beneficiaries. The ICU immediately organized itself and put together a committee, or *shura*, comprised of influential members of the Islamic scholarship and business communities. When Hasan Dahir Aweys was selected as chairman of ICU, he appointed to the executive body a dynamic leader, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (future president of TFG). As the ICU fleshed out its organizational leadership, warlords began feeling pressure from the Islamist interest. With CIA and Ethiopian assistance, they waged war against the ICU in the capital but were defeated and driven from Mogadishu within months. The quick ICU victory surprised the CIA and Ethiopia. However, from a Somali perspective, not everything was wrong. Indeed, the unification of the capital under the ICU bore a major success story: Mogadishu was a peaceful and safe place (from June to December 2006) for the first time in fifteen years. The U.S. and Somalia's neighbors spent this time nervously brooding

over the prospect of an Islamist takeover in southern Somalia which might spill over into Kenya and Ethiopia, which had their own large Islamic populations.

The Transitional Federal Government moved to Baidao before the ICU became a power to reckon with. Here, President Yusuf and the speaker of the parliament reconciled with the help of Yemeni President Ali Abdurahman Salah. They agreed to work together for the good of Somalia, in part because of their common fear of the ICU. On the whole, former warlords and the TFG government found unity in Baidao under an anti-Islamist flag. It was the TFG, lacking enough popular support to thwart the ICU, that invited the Ethiopian army to invade Somalia after diplomacy failed.

The Ethiopian invasion divided the flailing TFG again. The speaker of the parliament expressed discontent and disagreement with the president for advocating Ethiopian presence in Baidao and other parts of Somalia. Tired of Yusuf's position, he dared to take initiative in seeking resolution between the TFG and ICU. The Ethiopian government expressed discomfort with the speaker's efforts. President Yusuf, widely criticized as a puppet of the Ethiopian government, agreed with this assessment and distanced himself from the speaker's mission to the capital to talk with ICU leaders Aweys and Sheikh Sharif. These talks ultimately failed. Both sides accused each other of being stooges for Asmara and Addis Ababa, referencing the historical conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Ethiopia accused the ICU of receiving Eritrean support, while the ICU threatened that if Ethiopian forces did not leave, they would take the war into Ethiopia itself. This threat was serious enough to escalate the conflict between the

Ethiopian government and ICU. The Ethiopian army responded with a full-scale invasion of Somalia and crushed its rival militia by Christmas of 2006.

Prime Minister Ali Muhammad Ghedi resigned in October 2007 after months of political dispute with President Yusuf. President Yusuf appointed a new Prime Minister, Nur Hassan Hussein. In October 2008, violence spilled over a peaceful region when at least 28 people were killed in five suicide-bombings in northern Somalia. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility this heinous crime in Hargeisa, the capital of the breakaway northern region of Somaliland. In less than a year, President Yusuf sacked his Prime Minister, Nur Hassan Hussein in December 2008, accused he "failed to accomplish his duties."⁸³ However, the Parliament did not agree with the president and passed, 143-20, a vote of confidence in the government of Hussein. As predicted, President Yusuf disregarded the decision of the Parliament and went ahead to appoint Muhammad Mahmud Guled Gamadhere as prime minister. As internal political turmoil continued, Guled quickly has resigned, and said "I do not want to be seen as a stumbling block to the peace process which is going well now."⁸⁴ Within a week, the President himself resigned, and Ethiopia began withdrawing troops from Somalia in January, 2009. On January 31, 2009, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad (former leader of ICU), a moderate Islamist cleric was elected as President of Somalia. President Ahmed selected Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke to be his prime minister in February 2009. Parliament unanimously approved the appointment Sharmarke, the son of Somalia's second civilian president to deal with not only the Islamic extremist, Al-Shabaab or "the Youth" (hard-liner breakaway from Islamic Court

⁸³ British Broadcasting Corporation News, Somali President sacks Prime Minister ; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7782214.stm>

⁸⁴ British Broadcasting Corporation News, Somali President sacks Prime Minister ; available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7802622.stm>

Union), but also the growing pirate-networks that hijacked cargo ships passing through the Gulf of Aden en route to the Indian Ocean.

CHAPTER 4

Failed U.S. Policy in Somalia

United States foreign policy failed miserably in Somalia for two reasons. First, U.S. policy makers in Washington never took the time to study and analyze the complex politics of the Somali tribal system in determining how and when to involve itself in Somalia. Second, Washington's foreign policy, as is too often the case, focused on the current crisis without anticipating its consequences. A prime example of this historic problem in modern times can be found in the Middle East. The balance of power shifted to Iran after the U.S. invasion on Iraq, archenemy of Iran. The Bush administration had not considered the influence that would shift to Iran without Saddam Hussein in office. Even in the context of a "War on Terror," Washington turned its military against a former ally, Saddam and his Baath (Socialist) Party, instead of evaluating how to reduce the threat of radical Islam as sanctioned by the Iranian government.⁸⁵ The same strange logic of the Bush administration in the Middle East was applied to East Africa, where Islamic extremists can flourish because of the United States' ill-advised policy.

Somalia has been a cauldron of violence and struggle for power between warlords since Siad Barre's downfall in 1991. Washington only fueled the fire by empowering and funding ruthless warlords in combating Islamists. After the Islamic Court Union (ICU) rose to defeat the warlords, the U.S. had a serious enemy on its hands. Now the U.S.

⁸⁵ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2006), 84

changed its strategy by supporting the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, only furthering both Somali people and government's suspicion of American interest in their country.

One justification for the U.S. decision to support Ethiopia is that it was a last resort – a desperation move to contain the Somalia's rising Islamic movement. Who else would be better than Ethiopia, first because of location; secondly because Somali warlords were already defeated and no longer a viable option? Since the U.S. had no long-term political strategy in the region, its options were limited. There was already diplomatic trouble with both Sudan and Eritrea, and Somalia government is very weak to deal with the threat of ICU. What choice was left but to subcontract Ethiopia?

This is a very simplistic way to justify the United States' support for Somalia's historic enemy Ethiopia in order to resolve the crisis in Somalia. It is the same logic as to say that if the Pakistani government cannot put down the rise of Al-Qaeda influence and violence in the tribal areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan, then India could be invited to send its military and fix it. The U.S. and international community abandoned Somalia. It was allowed to become a failed state; a lawless and ungoverned part of the world in which international terrorists can find a safe haven. Yet, the question is: how do you prevent this from happening? There were allegations that the mastermind of the 1998 embassy attacks in East Africa, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, was hiding in Somalia. He was involved in the embassy bombings in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania which killed more than 225 people, including 12 Americans. As an Al-Qaeda operative, he was also suspected of planning and carrying out an attempt to shoot down an Israeli aircraft at

the Mombasa airport in Kenya, and a car bombing at a Kenyan resort that killed 13 and injured more than 80 people. The Bush administration had only one solution to justify the use of force: to link Islamic extremists in Somalia with Al-Qaeda. Now, small-scale Islamic radicals would receive material and moral support from an international jihadist organization, and soon became a power to reckon with. In a videotaped message, Al-Qaeda number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, called for guerilla war against American and its Ethiopian ally in.⁸⁶ The Bush administration saw this problem as requiring a military rather than diplomatic or political solution. Therefore, it bolstered its forces Camp Le Monier in Djibouti in 2002. This afforded the United States a combat force designed for quick reaction to any trouble in the Horn of Africa region.

The Somali people have been victim of colonialism, dictatorship, and warlord thugs. Now, they are at the crossroad of two extremist ideologies: George W. Bush's Christian ideology on one hand, and Islamic radicalism on the other, which want to wage a holy war on each other not only in Iraq an Afghanistan, but also in Somalia as well. Sadly, the people who ultimately suffer most form the majority: they do not subscribe to these radical ideologies. So far, Islamic radicals are winning the war in Somalia (see Figure 7). They defeated the U.S.-backed Ethiopian army and expelled them from Somalia after two years of occupation which resulted in unlawful killings, rape, arbitrary detention, and attacks on civilian property. Some 10,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed in Mogadishu, and over one million people are reported to have been displaced by the war

⁸⁶ Online NewsHour: Analysis, U.S. Launches in Somalia, Jan. 9, 2007

between Ethiopia and al-Shabaab, or “the Youth,” (a hard-line breakaway from the ICU) according to Centering Human Rights in U.S. Policy on Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.⁸⁷



FIGURE 7

Al-Shabaab Islamic Extremist⁸⁸

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned of the risk of escalating violence in Somalia and expressed the need to find a political solution to the problem. The Bush

⁸⁷ Subcommittee on African Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, March 11, 2008

⁸⁸ Feisal Omar/Reuters. Photo retrieved from <http://www.armybase.us>

administration came to partial agreement, also realizing that the use of force alone is not viable option. Its Ethiopian ally could no longer stand the indefatigable fighting zeal of the al-Shabaab insurgency by use of Iraqi-style guerilla tactics and suicide bombings. This kind of unregulated warfare resulted in enormous casualties on both sides and limited Ethiopian army movement outside of their barricades. The Ethiopian military occupation in Somalia became a magnet for recruitment of nationalists and Jihadists, who fought together for the one thing they had in common: resentment over Ethiopia's occupation of Somalia. Lee V. Cassanelli's epigraphic statement on Somali clan politics, "I and my tribe against the world," found a place in a new context. Now it was applied to Ethiopian aggression in Somalia, where Islamic radicals and Muslim moderates were fighting on the same side, for they had to drive out Ethiopia at any cost. Al-Shabaab, recognized as a terrorist organization by U.S., gained power with each day of Ethiopian incursion. When Ethiopia left, it was the hero. This was a major blow to Bush's counterterrorism efforts in East Africa. Before the Ethiopian army withdrew, the Bush administration introduced a plan to the United Nations that would see a U.N. peacekeeping mission replace Ethiopia in order to prevent Islamic extremists from taking full control of the lawless East African nation.⁸⁹ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressed concern over rising Islamic radicalism as well as piracy off the Somalia coast, which had resulted in the takeover of more than two dozen commercial vessels. Her concerns have never been addressed, partly because of fear that the U.N. might not have

⁸⁹ Colum Lynch, "U.S. Will Push U.N. for Somalia Mission: Peacekeeping Force Proposed to Stop Pirates, Reemergence of Islamist Militants," Washington Post, December 14, 2008; P. A26

the firepower to take on Islamists and pirates in a failed state.⁹⁰ The Secretary General voiced his doubts: “Even a larger and better-equipped U.N. peacekeeping force of 22,000 blue helmets would not be capable of stabilizing Somalia,” and that a much more powerful multinational force was needed.⁹¹ However, U.S. United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice (who served as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under President Bill Clinton) disagreed with Mr. Ki-moon’s opinion of the situation in Somalia. She argued, instead, that the United States, international community, and regional neighbors had to step up and provide political and economic support, as well as robust security protection, to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which is far too weak and fragile to control the country as it is.⁹² So far, the U.N. has not committed any peacekeeping forces to Somalia, yet the African Union had taken its own initiative. Uganda and Burundi have deployed hundreds of peacekeepers, while Nigeria and Rwanda to send several hundreds more.

While Ethiopia was in the process of leaving, the international community forced President Yusuf to resign for his failure to resolve the conflict and lead a stable government. The odds may have been against Yusuf; nonetheless, Islamic extremism had become a wider, more dangerous problem in his four years. He deposed two prime ministers during his reign but ultimately had to answer for his own shortcomings. The United States was not without some responsibility. It blundered in giving Mr. Yusuf the

⁹⁰ Colum Lynch, “U.S. Will Push U.N. for Somalia Mission: Peacekeeping Force Proposed to Stop Pirates, Reemergence of Islamist Militants,” Washington Post , December 14, 2008; P. A26

⁹¹ Ibid., A26

⁹² David Clarke, Somali Parliament Elected New President; available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSTRE50T2C620090130>; Internet, accessed 2 February 2009.

benefit of the doubt that he was capable of leading Somalia through its numerous afflictions: drought, endless civil war, starvation, and foreign occupation. In fact, he proved to be a warmonger who was willing to sanction Ethiopian occupation so long as it protected his palace in Mogadishu. The people had other ideas; a vast majority detested the Ethiopian presence in Somalia and felt humiliated by it. The shame of being “helped” by an enemy that probably had no intention of “helping” at all is why people supported al-Shabaab.

They derived their support from the nationalism of fighting an invader, not their strict interpretation of Islam and its harsh rule. The U.S. and Ethiopia gave them a forum to display themselves as protector and savior of the nation from “Christian” (U.S. and Ethiopian) crusaders. The international community, including Ethiopia, recognized defeat and the time to change course and move in a new direction of political resolution rather than continue futile use of force. The result was the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia, a coalition of moderate Islamist leaders, including Sheikh Sharif Ahmed. It was hoped that this new organization could find the balance between Islam and moderation. Mr. Ahmed and the transitional government agreed to a cease-fire in June 2008 that called on Ethiopia to leave in favor of U.N. troops. The deal was tenuous from the start and was greeted by much skepticism. Washington hawks rejected the idea of dealing with some of the moderates in the Islamic Court Union. To them, the ICU was a terrorist organization, and the United States does not negotiate with terrorists. Now the U.S. was betraying this strong (if pompous) policy by accepting a moderate Muslim and former ICU leader to lead the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia. Hawkish

objections aside, this was a brilliant political move by U.S. and U.N. to create the environment in which a member of the “winning” side could receive support in return for his moderation. Ahmed is very popular in Somalia and abroad, and many political analysts conclude that he is the best person for today’s Somalia because of his communication ability as well and knowledge of Islam which draws the respect of radicals. He promotes peace and an end to violence, but this does not stop the influential Al-Shabaab from branding him as a traitor and puppet of the West. They have vowed to fight against Sheikh Ahmed and his U.S. ally. Thus, even the most balanced resolutions cannot pacify the most radical Somalis.

What does the U.S. need to do in order to defeat Islamic radicals in Somalia? First, the U.S. needs to take an active leadership role by engaging the Muslim world and African nations in providing for Sheikh Ahmed’s government financial, political, and military so that he has the necessary tools to defeat Al-Shabaab. It must be remembered that Somalia is a failed state. Without any support from the international community, Ahmed’s government will not be able to survive, and Al-Shabaab will overrun it to bleak and dismal consequence. That means that Al-Qaeda will have another friendly base for stretching its network and pursuing new attacks. If this happens, the U.S. has no choice but to redeploy U.S. Marines to Somalia in an effort to eradicate Islamic extremism in East Africa. The world has afforded ample examples that the sentiments that sustain Al-Qaeda reproduce quickly and are hard to kill. Accordingly, this kind of conflict would be costly and more devastating than Operations Restore Hope in 1992, which led to eighteen American servicemen losing their lives and the infamous downing of two Black Hawk

helicopters. It is important to understand that it is in the best interest of U.S. and international community to help this new government to function and stand its own feet in order to defend itself and Somalia citizens against Islamic extremists. If the international community does not step up to the plate, then Somalia will degenerate back to anarchy.

In this respect, Afghanistan is classic example. Several decades ago, the United States was allied with Islamic extremists in an effort to defeat Soviet aggression. When the Soviet incursion was halted, the U.S. abandoned Afghanistan to chaos and, ultimately, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. As the U.S. became the new great imperialist power, the latter turned enemy and planned the horrible 9-11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The ensuing “War on Terror,” far from scaring Al-Qaeda, has only encouraged it. Osama bin Laden’s organization has maintained a high activity level and the determination to destroy U.S. as the symbol of Western evils. In Osama bin Laden's words, “What prompted us to address the American government is the fact that it is the head of the Western and crusading forces in their fight against Islam and against Muslim.”⁹³

⁹³D’Souza, 15

Al-Qaeda and its subsidiaries will find a home wherever they can. If, hypothetically, Afghanistan were to stabilize while Somalia remained chaotic, Al-Qaeda would run its operations from Somalia. Its weak government does not have the resources to defend itself against international Islamic extremism as well as the growing pirate-networks that continue to hijack cargo ships passing through the Gulf of Aden. For instance, late 2008, a peripheral crisis drew international (and American) attention back to the somewhat-forgotten failed state of Somalia. Not everyone could find a livelihood amidst a failing economy and war-torn mainland; some took to piracy. Vast and virtually uninhibited pirate networks had long been hijacking cargo ships passing through the Gulf of Aden en route to the Indian Ocean. In April 2009, they attacked an American ship, taking the captain hostage on a lifeboat for a huge ransom. The standoff ended with a high-tech rescue mission. Three pirates were killed by sniper fire in the process. Their organization vowed revenge and quickly embarked on a daring hijacking spree. The escalation suggested that Somalia, already a corollary to the international “War on Terror,” might become the very center of a “war on piracy.” This, of course, carries the threat of still more instability for an already troubled nation. However, it also holds some promise. With America and the world’s attention drawn back to Somalia by an endangerment of its own interests, there is the hope that the international community might connect lawlessness on the seas to lawlessness within the country itself. It would seem that, as is usually the case, the solution lies at the root of the problem. Pirates may be thugs, but they are able translators of the message that Somalia needs help. After all, who aspires to be a pirate if he is not driven – forced – into it? One may hope that, if the United States gets involved, this time it will not be for its own good so much as the

Somali people's. Any success probably hinges on its good intentions, as otherwise the right thing will never be done. One may also hope that the prevalent media images of Islamic radicals and pirates are not stamped upon the people as a whole. The truth is, opposite of representing them, they have suffered at the hands of these selfish interests; and they have suffered more than the richest, most powerful nation in the world could ever imagine. If the international community continues to ignore the real issue (Islamic radicals) in this region, Somalia could be the new Afghanistan.

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