



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Post-Communism and Desintegration: Somalia in the New World Order

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**Abstract:**

The years after the Cold War were characterized as a confusing period, both at a global and a regional level. From the ashes of communism rose a new world order that altered the previous situation not only in Europe, but also in America, Africa and Asia. In this way, many countries were affected by the change, especially in the African continent, which for decades had become a board on which communist and liberal powers face through the so-called proxy wars. Likewise, Somalia suffered the consequences of the new international situation which had already developed in the late 1980s. This country, which was a socialist state, but which surprisingly was an ally of the United States, suffered since 1991 a process of unprecedented state collapse, becoming the paradigm of Failed State.

Post-communism in the Horn of Africa is a period of instability because of terrorism, piracy and warlordism. This situation is a direct consequence of the collapse that Somalia suffered in 1991. The objective of this paper will be based on analyzing the main causes that triggered the civil war and the disintegration of Somalia. Although the internal causes (clan group, weak state, conflicts, etc.) have traditionally been exposed as the main reasons for this collapse, it is necessary to take into account other external reasons such as the new international strategies, the regional situation or the progressive disinterest of the United States in supporting Siad Barre's regime. Considering all these causes, it will be possible to wholly understand why Somalia became a Failed State.

**Keywords:** *Somalia; Failed State; Post-communism; Siad Barre; Collapse*

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## **1. Introduction**

The end of the Cold War produced an alteration in many state structures worldwide. The case of Somalia is paradigmatic because after almost three decades it remains as a Failed State. The inability of his government to control the country due to the actions of the guerrillas, warlords, terrorists and piracy have created an untenable situation. Although Somalia was not the only case of Failed State (Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan...) the truth is that its inability to be rebuilt is not very common. In the end, a dictatorship falling does not always create a political vacuum. Many of the countries that suffered dictatorships did not end up in anarchy (Bahdon, 2012a: 19).

First of all, it is vital to analyze what were the causes that led Somalia to the disaster. This work has been previously done, but the focus has always been on some specific causes, without taking into account that it is necessary to carry out a holistic vision. Depending on the origin of the source, the causes of the disintegration of Somalia vary. On the one hand, western historiography has centered its attention on the clan factor, religion or the lack of a national feeling. On the other hand, there are numerous interpretations that condense the evils of the continent into an external conspiracy obsessed with destroying the social, religious and political pillars of the african population (Gutiérrez de Terán, 2011a: 13).

Throughout this work we will analyze in detail all the possible elements that produced the disintegration of the country in 1991. Thus, the roots of this conflict that ended up devastating Somalia will be analyzed, considering both external and internal causes. Faced with the traditional image that establishes the division into clans of Somalia as the main culprit, we will see that the causes are very variable. This review will allow us to reflect on the current situation in Somalia and why it has been unable to go through a rebuilding process that would allow it to create a better future for a population that is exhausted by the ravages of violence and instability.

## **2. From Siad Barre's Government to the Civil War**

General Mohamed Siad Barre came to power in 1969 through a coup led by the military discontented with the government of Ali Shermarke. Thus, Siad Barre established a Supreme Revolutionary Council inspired by scientific socialism (Martínez Carrera, 1993: 102). Since then the new government controlled the country with an iron hand, giving great importance to the irredentist project of 'Great Somalia'. This led him to face Ethiopia in the so-called Ogaden War (1977-1978). The defeat of Somalia created a deep impact on Somali society and some evidence even "suggests that by the mid-1980s Somalia was already a failed state. With the partial exception of the security sector, most government institutions began to atrophy in the years following the disastrous Ogaden War with Ethiopia in 1977-78. Fierce government repression, heightened clan cleavages and animosities, gross levels of corruption, and low salaries all combined to accelerate the state's decline. The public school system, a source of pride and progress in the 1970s, crumbled. Production on state-run farms and in factories plummeted" (Menkhaus, 2007a: 80).

In this situation, different forces emerged contrary to Siad Barre's regime. During the Somali civil war a first stage of direct confrontation began between the troops of Barre and these armed organizations that, from north to south, declared their objective to overthrow the president (Gutiérrez de Terán, 2007a: 38-39). It should be noted that in 1990, in this conflictive environment, "114 intellectual and urban elites, consisting of the

## **Post-Communism and Desintegration: Somalia in the New World Order**

most notable politicians, religious leaders, professionals, and members of the business community, acknowledged the severity of the crisis and issued a manifesto to Siad Barre” asking him to withdraw from power to save his society from an imminent collapse (Haji Ingiriis, 2012a: 68).

His rejection and growing tension led the Somaliland region to continue fighting for its independence, something achieved in 1991. But the state break caused by Somaliland was not the worst consequence. It is estimated that between 1988 and 1992 the civil war left at least 250,000 deaths due to hunger and war and an estimated one million people fled the country. War crimes spread throughout the territory and clan ties were broken by struggles for power and conflict. In addition, the vacuum in the government allowed different warlords to gain control of some regions. Soon the first terrorist organizations also appeared in this breeding ground (Menkhaus, 2007b: 81).

When Siad Barre left Mogadishu in January 1991, he left a country totally devastated and with few options to recover. Then, “troops, commanded by General Mohamed Farah Aideed gave chase to Siad Barre, while others under control of Ali Mahdi Mohamed, a wealthy Mogadishu businessman, remained in the capital and declared themselves the new government” (Clark, 1993a: 112). This absence allowed different factions to control de capital and to be confronted in order to gain power . To understand how Somalia could reach this situation it is necessary to analyze what were the factors of this disintegration process.

### **3. External causes: a new world order**

The new international situation is going to have some consequences throughout the world, but especially in the Horn of Africa. The logic of a post-cold war and the regional context are two factors that should be taken into account when Somali crisis is evoked.

#### **3.1 Post-Cold War era and the new international context**

The course of the Cold War placed Ethiopia and Somalia in two opposing blocs. The first state was an ally of United States until 1974, when Haile Selassie gave up the power. The revolution that was led by Mengistu Haile Mariam was followed by new state structures based on scientific socialism. Since that moment Ethiopia and its government was protected by the USSR. Interestingly, Somalia was part of the socialist bloc until 1977. But during the Ogaden War the USSR and Cuba, traditional allies of Somalia, decided to support Ethiopia. As a result, when the war ended up Somalia had to look for new supporters and finally Siad Barre joined United States coalition. Since that year, Somalia became a strategic country for the western bloc due to its geostrategic situation. The fear of the expansion of communism allowed Siad Barre to acquire military and economic aid worth around 800 million dollars, an aid that did not take into account human rights abuses (Jackson, 2007: 704).

However, this status was altered after 1985. Gorbachev's coming to power changed the logic of the Cold War through the new international policy. “In the case of Eastern Europe, this approach entailed Soviet tolerance for the fall of single-party communist states and a recognition of the need to allow the peoples of Eastern Europe to determine their own political paths independent of Soviet control. Throughout the various regions of the Third World, the new political thinking entailed a rejection of revolutionary struggle and, instead, the need for political negotiations and compromise to resolve ongoing regional disputes and civil disputes” (Schraeder, 1994a: 91-92). It was then that the Siad Barre regime began to suffer the consequences: United States, in view of the new

situation, no longer needed to continue financing an authoritarian regime in Somalia. Thus, Siad Barre was increasingly isolated and the cut of resources prevented him from staying in power.

### **3.2 International aid for Somalia**

Somalia received large amounts of international aid. If until 1977 he had benefited from the economic and military financing provided by the USSR, since that year United States became the main benefactor of the regime. In exchange for the strategic situation of Somalia, the US provided the necessary assistance for the internal stability of the regime. This aid allowed to temporarily stop the Somali armed groups that, sponsored by Ethiopia, began to put the Siad Barre government against the wall (Gutiérrez de Terán, 2007b: 35). Menkhaus explained how this aid was addressed in two directions. “Externally, the Somali state became a ward of the international aid community. Internally, it devolved into an instrument of repression and expropriation, a tool to dominate political opponents and rival clans, expropriate resources, and above all serve as a catchment point for foreign aid that was then diverted into the pockets of civil servants clever, powerful, or well connected enough to place themselves at strategic spigots in the foreign aid pipeline” (Menkhaus, 2007c: 80-81).

This unsustainable situation led the government to completely depend on foreign aid, which reached 57% of the country's GDP (Henze, 1991: 125). Due to a combination of strategic interests, donor states had ignored the systematic state corruption, land grabbing sponsored by the state and the corrupt attitude of its security forces (Menkhaus, 2014: 156). Nonetheless, in the new international context, many donors no longer needed to continue supporting Siad Barre. The subsequent cancellation of international aid from the Western countries between 1988-1989, prompted the rapid collapse of a government devoid of the resources necessary to control the country (Menkhaus, 2007d: 80-81)

It is also crucial to refer to weapons smuggling that spread in the region due to international aid. First, the ongoing support of the USSR to Somalia until 1977 allowed this country to build the most powerful army in all Sub-Saharan Africa, consisting of more than 37,000 soldiers, heavy artillery and a modern air force (Meredith, 2011: .562). This concede Siad Barre's strength to face his enemies abroad, but also in the interior, facing opponents with the aim of staying in power at all costs (Basteman, 1996: 126). Likewise, the military leaders of the Barre government, with access to all kinds of weapons, began to undermine the formal institutions of the state such as the police or the army, creating their own networks that allowed them to oppress the masses and exploit resources for their own benefit (Khayre, 2016: 23). When the country was disintegrated many of these leaders maintained control of this huge amount of weapons, allowing them to establish their power in different regions and cities.

Notwithstanding, cutting funding can not solely explain the reasons that led to the country's disintegration. The collapse of the government could have allowed another leader who had the ability to lead the country to stability and democratic transition to take power, as happened in other countries in the region, such as Ethiopia.

### **3.3 Regional context**

It is essential to reflect on the regional situation that also affected Somalia. This country, together with Ethiopia, lived since the end of the 1980s a process of state decomposition. “By 1988 Siad Barre 's fragile grip on Somalia was paralleled by Mengistu's own desperate attempts to keep the upper hand in a series of civil wars in

## **Post-Communism and Desintegration: Somalia in the New World Order**

Ethiopia. The two despots predictably struck a deal, abandoning support for insurgent groups waging war from their respective territories” (Clark, 1993b: 111).

In the case of Somalia, its stability was compromised since 1981 by the military success of the Somali National Movement (SNM) formed by members of the Isaaq clan, as well as other groups such as the United Somali Congress (USC) constituted by the Hawiye or the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) of the Ogadeni. Mengistu had to face old enemies of stability in Ethiopia: a coalition of three guerrillas formed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) with members of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPFL), the Oromo Liberation Front and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPFL) (Schraeder, 1994b: 93) Somalia had also supported the so-called Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) which fought for the integration of Ogaden within Somalia and which was later replaced by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) (Ododa, 1985: 289).

Although this pact tried to close one of the open fronts, the truth is that it came too late and by 1988 both governments were already noticing the wear and tear that was supposed to stay in power when all these formations were trying to overthrow them.

### **4. Internal factors: beyond clan division**

When talking about internal motives it is commonly believed that only clan division caused the disintegration of Somalia. Although it was an important fact, it was not the unique factor. Adversely, it will be scrutinized other causes like postcolonial state, Somaliland independence or Siad Barre's rules.

#### **4.1 Postcolonial state**

Postcolonial state has been considered the main culprit of the African disaster due to the enormous social, cultural, political and economic diversity existing within the new states. Biju Kumar referred to the inability of the postcolonial state to respond to the phenomenon of diversity in relation to communism, ethnic nationalism, regional identity or secessionism (Kumar, 2005: 936) However, we must bear in mind that each state has its particularities. The case of Somalia is very striking due to the ethnic identities. Although there are different clans they all feel Somalis. Therefore, it does not seem plausible that the fragmentation of the country is caused only by different nationalist tendencies.

Other authors, such as Taddia, have explained postcolonial dysfunctionality through the artificiality of this state model that was something imported from outside the continent (Taddia, 2004: 99). In the same line, this failure is justified because the incorporated institutional structures were totally alien to the Somali institutions prior to colonization. The clash between decentralized pastoral structures and the high centralization of the postcolonial model that concentrated its powers on urban structures was inevitable (Ahmed & Herbold, 1999a: 115). Nonetheless, this explanation also falls short. Theories advocating the failure of postcolonial model because it was imported are not convincing. There are instances of postcolonial African states like Kenya, Tanzania or Botswana that have demonstrated their ability to maintain stability. Although it should be taken into account the clash between pre-colonial structures and the postcolonial model as a plausible cause of state collapse. Furthermore, Abdillahi Bahdon refers to other factors like the complicated construction of the nation-state, the governmental legitimacy,

the modernization of society or the weakness of the national economy etc. (Bahdon, 2012b: 14).

Gutiérrez de Terán has also indicated that one of the reasons for the state collapse in Somalia was due to a 'hasty' reunification of Somalia. Due to the nationalist enthusiasm, British Somalia proclaimed its independence only four days before proceeding to union with Italian Somalia. This process took place without any previous project (Gutiérrez de Terán, 2011b: 17). Finally, Terrence Lyons referred to the state decomposition and its relation to the lack of popular support and legitimacy (Lyons, 1994: 46). This could explain why Somalia collapsed precisely at the beginning of 1991 and not before. Until the 1980s, the Siad Barre government had, with some exceptions, broad support from Somali society, especially for the irredentist program that promised the unification of all the Somali peoples. However, the consequences of the Ogaden War (1977-1978) produced a discontent that grew throughout the following decade.

Therefore, it could be said that postcolonial State in Somalia is one of the reasons that caused the dismemberment in 1991. Nevertheless, it can't be said that postcolonial state failed because it was a foreign model. Its maladjustment to local structures affected state institutions directly. In addition, it must not be forgotten that for two decades the Somali state maintained a certain stability. Only when the legitimacy of the government began to be questioned the postcolonial model began to crumble.

#### **4.2 Clans and opposing parties**

Traditionally, Somalia has been portrayed as country composed of peoples and 'tribes' with different identities that face each other. But contrary to traditional thoughts, this state is one of the most homogenous countries in Africa in terms of ethnicity (85% of the population identifies itself as Somali), religion (99% are Sunni Muslims) and language (85% of the population speaks the Somali language) In fact, Somali peoples are divided into clans, including the Darod, Dir, Isaaq, Hawiye, and Digil-Mirifle (Kimenyi, Mbaku & Moyo, 2010a: 1348-1349) Identities are not, however, only clan-attached. Race, language, status or socioeconomic divisions play a very important role. In addition, there are other realities outside the clan division that do not feel as somali people such as the descendants of merchants from Arabia or the inhabitants of the Juba valley, direct heirs of zigua slaves. Similarly, clan membership is not irrevocable, people may change their membership for protection, marriage, work or political reasons (Besteman, 1996: 123-124).

However, it will not be denied here that clans have clashed on different occasions throughout history, but neither is fair the image that has made the clan the only reason that led to Somalia's disintegration. It was combined with other factors. Thus, after the defeat of Somalia in the Ogaden War, Siad Barre had to face a coup d'état that, although dodged, had repercussions on the president's reaction. First of all, he was convinced of staying in power at any cost. He removed representatives of other clans from power in order to surround himself with trusted high officials and leaders from his sub-clan, the Marehan of the Darod. This set a dangerous precedent in the political development of Somalia, political grouping around clan origin (Robinson, 2016: 241).

Thereby, the different groups reacted by forming parties opposed to the regime. For instance, some of the Majerteen leaders of the failed coup d'état formed the so-called Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) with the support of the Ethiopian army. Other prominent clan movements were the Somali National Movement (SNM) founded by the Isaaqs or the United Somali Congress (USC) of the Hawiye. These political-military

## **Post-Communism and Desintegration: Somalia in the New World Order**

groups had a common goal, to overthrow Siad Barre's government (Ahmed et al., 1999b: 118-119).

Thus, by the end of 1989 the regime had been facing internal armed opposition for almost ten years and, in response to its attacks, it had punished the civilian population of its country by razing regions such as Mudug, Galgadug, Hiiran and the lower Shabelle regions (Ingiriis, 2012b: 67). By 1991 the general was deposed by the rebels of the United Somali Congress (USC) who appointed Al Mahdi Mohamed as head of state despite not controlling the entire territory. The divisions were not long in coming: its main opponent, Farah Aidid, did not recognize its legitimacy and declared war on him removing any possibility of maintaining a common government (Bahdon, 2012c: 20).

### **4.3 Somaliland and regional breakdown**

During the open war the SNM fought not only against Siad Barre but also for Somaliland's freedom. This region was the only one to declare unilateral independence in 1991, which led to an unprecedented state breakdown and a climate of total territorial dismemberment.

The roots of this secession can be traced back to the union of the two Somali colonies: the former British colony, known as Somaliland, in the north and the Italian colony of Somalia in the south. The enthusiasm to become one country led the Somalilanders to accept a number of conditions from the southern leaders like Mogadishu being capital and hosting the new Parliament. Thus, the Somalis of the South held the main government positions and most of the seats in the parliamentary assembly. Moreover, the government's development policies were unable to address the socio-economic problems of the North (Ahmed et al., 1999c: 116). Northern people were soon disappointed with this union, but the policy of Mogadishu's governments to try to unify all Somalis in one country deterred them from more pro-independence positions. However, after 1978 Siad Barre had to change his international stance and once irredentism had disappeared from the political landscape, Somaliland began its journey towards independence.

The main group that addressed this independent movement was the Somali National Movement (SNM), founded in 1981. The SNM gained followers in Somaliland, particularly among the Isaaq, who represented 70% of the population. Little by little they opposed Siad Barre until in 1988 they declared open war with the aim of liberating the region. The government's response, based on campaigns of terror and massive bombardments that ravaged the current capital, Hargeysa, eventually discredited Siad Barre's image. By 1991 the SNM was the hegemonic group in the region and the only political group capable to organize a new government. After Siad Barre was deposed unilateral independence was declared the 18th of May 1991 (Gutiérrez de Terán, 2011c: 22-23).

Although Somaliland was not recognized as a real independent state, the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI), created an impact on the social imaginary of Somalia, materializing the break-up of the state. Even at present, Somaliland independence is considered as the main impediment to Somalia's reunification.

### **4.4 Siad Barre's policies: corruption, repression and irredentism**

The policies developed by Siad Barre during his administration between 1969 and 1991 created the perfect breeding ground for state disintegration. It can even be said, in general terms, that the Siad Barre government ended up digging its own grave.

Firstly, Siad Barre's action upon his arrival in government was the dealing out of power shares among his closest allies. The president justified the plundering of the country through 'scientific socialism' by nationalizing access to land and water, as well as other means of production that fell to his own clan members and supporters. The economy was also declining gradually due to the country's mismanagement and the few economic measures put in place (Kimenyi et al., 2010b: 1349-1350). These measures, coupled with corruption, caused great discontent in the various regions of Somalia. The situation worsened when President Barre reinforced the presence in government of loyal members of his clan and some allies. As mentioned earlier, nepotism created a marginalization of power that led some clan members to rally around parties and guerrillas that tried to overthrow the Mogadishu government.

Secondly, the government's increasing repression of opponents created a climate of tension throughout the 1980s. Due to the stress of losing power Siad Barre pursued policies of oppression. This repression fuelled resentment among Somalis and fear to the state. Likewise, the policy of 'divide and rule' spread distrust among the clans (Menkhous, 2007e: 78-79). All this affected the development of the country after the fall of Siad Barre, as this mistrust incapacitated the different opposition parties from forming a common front and creating a government of unity. Thus, many clan groups came to the conclusion that they could not rely on a central government, but depend on their own clan in terms of social and economic security and prosperity. In this way, many warlords became visible heads who provided the security that the state had ceased to provide years ago (Kimenyi et al., 2010c: 1350-1351). This facilitated the fragmentation of the country and the territorial control in the hands of so-called warlordism.

Finally, Siad Barre tried to carry out the Great Somalia project. The aim of this irredentist measure was to ensure that the Somali State, born in 1960, was joined by other regions where the majority of Somalis lived. This was the case of Djibouti, the Ogaden and Haud regions in Ethiopia and the North Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya. Irredentism became the main target for different Somali governments and it was even mandated in 1960 Somali Constitution: "The Somali Republic shall promote, by legal and peaceful means, the union of Somali territories and encourage solidarity among the peoples of the world, and in particular among African and Islamic peoples" (Constitution of Somalia, 1960)

But irredentism was not only an instrument that sought to unite all Somali peoples in the Horn of Africa. This policy has been used to ensure the control of Mogadishu over a cohesive Somali population. Thus, common enemies became the perfect pretext to divert attention from the country's internal problems. In addition, since independence some politicians supported irredentism to create a Greater Somalia only with the aim of diverting attention from the internal problems of the country, which were very numerous. Some did it to win popular support and legitimize their governments (Kendie, 2003: 76). Others did it because they really believed that once the dream of reunification was achieved, Somalia would move forward and become a regional power. Be that as it may, the fact is that the reiterative use of expansionist propaganda was a very useful tool to control crowds and keep the Somali people together. Siad Barre will exploit these strategies in order to unite a community that although they shared cultural, religious and linguistic features, only had been living under the same state over a decade ago.

Nonetheless, Somalia's defeat in 1978 marked a turning point in the application of this policy. No further irredentist measures were implemented although the 1979 Constitution recognized that the primary objective of the Democratic Republic of Somalia



## Post-Communism and Desintegration: Somalia in the New World Order

was to liberate all Somali territories and unite their peoples (Constitution of Somalia, 1979:7). For decades, irredentism had functioned as an instrument that united Somalis with a common goal. But once this goal became unattainable, nationalist ties and aspirations were weakened and it led to an inexorable dismemberment of national feeling. This process was reinforced in 1988 when the Somali government signed a peace treaty with Ethiopia. This agreement only widened the disappointment among all sectors of the country, spreading the idea that their own government had made a pact with Somalia's greatest enemy in order to gain time, stay in power and continue to oppress their own people.

### 5. Conclusion

Many conclusions could be drawn on this subject, but we will focus on the main ones. Firstly, when we talk about Somalia, we must put aside the great theories that claim that there is a 'major cause' for its disintegration in 1991. It is also necessary to set aside those ideas that give greater importance to external causes or internal causes separately.

Secondly, when we try to approach the reasons that made Somalia a Failed State, we must do so with a broad vision. It is not easy to explain why this country has been trying to rebuild itself for almost three decades. This is why it is so important to conduct a holistic analysis that explains correctly the causes that led Somalia into chaos and instability.

Everything is linked actually. The fall of the Siad Barre government can be explained by the international context since 1985, but this does not justify the fragmentation suffered in 1991. Other states suffered the same situation as Somalia, such as Ethiopia, but in just a few years they managed to recover state structures.

The disintegration of Somalia was therefore due to the international and regional context, but was also due to the post-colonial state model imposed since 1960. However, the end of this state cannot be understood without an analysis of the clan divisions of the opposition parties and the secession of Somaliland. At the same time these insurmountable divisions cannot be explained without a detailed study of the policies that Siad Barre regime has pursued since it came to power in 1969. Nepotism and corruption, the repression of the 1980s and the end of irredentist politics may explain the growing political, economic, social and identity dismemberment in Somalia. But again, these policies cannot be understood without an analysis of all the above factors, whether internal, external or regional.

All this factors explain the complexity situation that created the conditions for the total disintegration of Somalia in 1991. Likewise, if we want to holly understand this process it is essential to analyze one by one the roots that have converted Somalia in a Failed State.

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