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BACKGROUND CASE STUDY

SOMALIA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

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Introduction

The Horn of Africa (HOA) is one of the most underdeveloped regions on earth. It is also one of the most conflict-ridden, insecure regions in the world. While Africa as a whole has enjoyed a trend in recent years toward reduction and termination of many of its civil wars, the HOA is the exception to the rule. Indeed, the region's prolonged armed conflicts have spread, engulfing several neighboring states in warfare and partial state collapse.

Given the severity of these crises of war, insecurity, state failure, and underdevelopment in the HOA, social scientists can take one of two positions. One is to argue that the HOA in general -- and Somalia in particular, which has had no functioning central government for 20 years -- is unique, an outlier case which does not conform to standard theories of conflict and development. The other position is to argue that precisely because the HOA is the most serious crisis zone in the world it constitutes a "crucial case study" which theories of underdevelopment, protracted war, and state failure *must* adequately explain if they are to claim validity. This paper embraces the latter position. While aspects of the HOA case are obviously unique, and sensitivity to context and complexity must be privileged in both analysis of and policy toward the Horn, the region's crises are not so distinct that they preclude useful comparative analysis.¹

This paper considers conflict dynamics across the entire Horn of Africa, but devotes special attention to the case of Somalia which, because of the depth, length, and significance of its crisis, is a source of particular international concern. Because Somalia's crisis has been so protracted and has gone through several very distinct phases, it provides an opportunity to compare conflict dynamics in a single country over time.

Part I Hypothesis testing

Causes and Dynamics of Violent Conflict

Predisposition to conflict, 1980s. The first twenty years of Somalia's independence featured no internal armed conflict. A coup in 1969 ended the country's first decade of occasionally dysfunctional and increasingly clannist multi-party democracy, but the socialist government of Siyad Barre initially promoted a strong sense of nationalist unity. Nonetheless, during this period two factors made the country somewhat vulnerable to armed conflict. One was the powerful social identity of clannism, which pulled at the seams of nationalist unity and was easy for political elites to manipulate for parochial purposes. The second was the country's deep poverty, which, combined with rapid population growth and urban drift on the part of a large pastoral population, produced growing land pressures in the countryside and a growing number

¹ The notion of "crucial cases" was first articulated by Harry Eckstein in "Case Studies and Theory in Political Science," in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science; Scope and Theory* Vol. 7, pp. 94-137 (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975). For a recent refinement of the approach, see John Gerring, "Is There a (Viable) Crucial-Case Method?" *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2007), pp. 231-53. The methodological approach of this paper is informed by the work of Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Boston: MIT Press, 2005).

of unemployed young men who could potentially be recruited into armed groups or criminal gangs. But Somalia's strategic importance in the Cold War enabled the Barre regime to attract high levels of foreign aid, giving it the ability to engage in patronage politics and to build one of the largest standing armies in sub-Saharan Africa.² That large army helped to absorb the growing number of unemployed youth.

Somalia had made irredentist claims on neighboring states since independence, and its aspirations to unify all Somali populations in a single Somali state culminated in a disastrous war with Ethiopia in 1977-78. Somalia lost, and the heavy casualties, refugee crises, and recriminations which ensued accelerated an already pronounced drift toward repression and authoritarianism.³ By 1980 two weak clan-based armed insurgencies arose, both based in Ethiopia, and northern Somalia was under military rule. The 1980s saw Somalia become one of the most repressive and predatory regimes in Africa, and Barre resorted to divide and rule tactics, exacerbating clan divisions.⁴ At this point, the country was ripe for armed conflict.

The country's pre-war profile generally matches up with the factors most frequently cited in conflict vulnerability analysis as rendering a country susceptible to armed conflict. Somalia was extremely poor; its government was repressive and predatory, fueling deep grievances; the government was highly dependent on a rentier economy, in this case foreign aid derived from the country's strategic importance; and that source of revenue began to quickly plummet as the Cold War waned in the late 1980s. Somalia had not had a previous civil war – one of the factors cited as among the most accurate predictors of a new civil war – but it had endured a terrible inter-state war with neighboring Ethiopia that had the effect of militarizing the country. But the most important factor rendering the country vulnerable to armed conflict was the combination of the Barre regime's profound levels of corruption, its clannish divide and rule tactics, and its willingness to resort to very heavy-handed lethal force against its own population in the quest to remain in power.

Precipitating factors, 1980s. Somalia was engulfed by civil war in 1988, and in January 1991 multiple clan-based militias drove the Barre government out of the capital Mogadishu. Several factors triggered the armed conflict. A secret deal between Barre and Ethiopian dictator Mengistu to cease hosting insurgencies at one another's expense had the unintentional effect of prompting the Somali National Movement (SNM) to launch an all-out attack into northern Somalia in order to establish a presence inside Somalia. The government's response to the SNM offensive involved "systematic" human rights abuses and the murder of thousands of northern civilians, producing a flow of 300,000 to 500,000 refugees into Ethiopia.⁵ In response, Western aid donors froze assistance to the government. The waning of the Cold War reduced Somalia's strategic importance, making it easier for donors to suspend aid. Because the bloated Somali state and military depended so heavily on foreign aid, the suspension of aid led to a rapid

² Ken Menkhaus, "US Foreign Assistance to Somalia: Phoenix from the Ashes?" *Middle East Policy* vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 124-149.

³ Ahmed Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Zed Press, 1988), pp. 133-40.

⁴ I.M. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali* (4th edition) (Oxford: James Currey Press, 2002), pp. 248-54.

⁵ Robert Gersony, "Why Somalis Flee: Synthesis of Accounts of Conflict Experience in Northern Somalia by Somali Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Others," (Washington DC: US Department of State, Bureau for Refugee Programs, 1989) <http://www.cja.org/downloads/Why%20Somalis%20Flee.pdf>; David Rawson, *The Somali State and Foreign Aid* (Arlington Virginia: US Department of State Foreign Service Institute, 1993).

shrinkage and retreat of the state and desertions of whole units of the military. In retrospect, the Somali state was a castle built on sand. The loss of external funds meant that the government lost its ability to hold together the polity by a combination of patronage and coercion. Grievances against the Barre regime quickly found expression in a proliferation of clan-based liberation movements, which found ready recruits in the growing ranks of deserters.

Factors sustaining conflict. The fall of the Barre government did not produce an accord between the victorious armed factions. Instead, they began fighting among themselves in what developed into a devastating war of predation in 1991-92. A number of factors worked against their ability to reach a power-sharing accord. One was the legacy of deep distrust between the clans sown by Barre as part of his divide and rule tactics. Second, a wave of retaliatory attacks on clans associated with the Barre government produced a massive wave of ethnic cleansing across all of Somalia, as virtually all Somalis were forced to flee to their clan home bases for security. This ethnic polarization would prove to be a major impediment to reconciliation. It also meant that some clans were able to militarily occupy and control the most valuable real estate in the country – the capital and rich riverine farmland nearby – at the expense of other clans. Occupiers of this real estate had reduced incentive to promote reconciliation which would invariably require return of stolen private and government property.⁶ Third, a war economy quickly developed, in which militias and their financial backers had powerful incentives to perpetuate a state of war. Unpaid militiamen in the liberation movement immediately set about looting government buildings and embassies, and then turned to loot civilian assets. The transition from grievance-driven insurgency to a war economy driven by looting occurred with extraordinary speed. In the two year civil war that ensued, all of the clan militias fought primarily to gain control over areas to loot. As famine conditions ensued and 240,000 Somalis lost their lives, external food aid itself became a principal item in the war economy. The Somali crisis of 1991-92 strongly supports the “greed to grievance” hypothesis and is in fact a textbook case. At the level of individual gunmen, a basic and dangerous living was eeked out via looting and extortion; for top warlords and their financial backers. Fortunes were made from everything from export of scrap metal to diversion of food aid.⁷

The Somali case confirms the hypothesis that access to conflict resources is critical for the rise of armed insurgencies. The liberation movements that after 1991 degenerated into clan militias had access to lootables on the ground, including international food aid that poured into the country by 1992. They also availed themselves of funding from the increasingly large and mobilized Somali diaspora. The large number of unemployed youth provided a pool of cheap recruits for the militias. Finally, the fact that the wider region was awash in cheap weaponry made it easy for militia to arm themselves and engage in sustained battles.

The war of 1991-92 deepened clan animosities and sharpened the competing narratives – or, more precisely, litanies of grievances – of rival clans. No other viable form of political organization outside of the clan was possible – even the coalitions that were attempted were clan alliances -- and efforts to establish civic organizations that competed with militias were

⁶ Lee Cassanelli, “Explaining the Somali Crisis,” in *The Struggle for land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*, edited by Catherine Besteman and Lee Cassanelli (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

⁷ Ken Menkhaus, “Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism.” Adelphi Paper 364. (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 2004).

dangerous and futile. The one partial exception to this rule, the Islamist movement Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya, attempted to create a movement that transcended clan in 1991 but was unable to stand up to clan militias.⁸ The complete collapse of the state, and the marginalization of clan elders, meant that gunmen and warlords were a law unto themselves. Opportunities to profiteer from criminal violence were virtually unlimited in 1991-92. During this period, state collapse and armed conflict constituted mutually reinforcing pathologies. Not surprisingly, this environment proved ideal for the ascent of unscrupulous and myopic leadership which actively fomented clan divisions and lawlessness.

The Somali case also demonstrates that once a government is allowed to collapse entirely and for an extended period, it becomes much harder to revive the collapsed state. State collapse cannot be allowed to fester without exponentially increasing the difficulties of reviving government institutions.

Opportunities missed. The early period of armed conflict in Somalia constituted a series of missed opportunities to broker accords before the crisis slipped into new and more intractable dimensions. The first missed opportunity occurred in 1989-90, when external efforts to broker an agreement between insurgents and the Barre regime might have spared the country from a full-fledged civil war. But the international community was preoccupied with bigger matters – including the end of the Cold War, and the Gulf War in Kuwait – and Somalia was at that point of little strategic consequence.⁹

One of the great missed opportunities in Somalia was the failure of the clan liberation movements to agree on a new government in the immediate aftermath of the ouster of the Barre regime. Close observers of the crisis in its early phases argue that if international mediation and pressure had been brought to bear on Somali militia commanders, the fighting could have been stopped before the disastrous clashes of November 1991 which destroyed most of central Mogadishu.¹⁰

Opportunities seized. Lessons can also be drawn from the northwest and northeast of Somalia, two communities which managed to avoid a descent into armed anarchy. In the northeast corner of Somalia, a fragile peace was maintained largely through the cohesion of clan elders and their application of customary law. This was done without a formal state structure, until 1999 when the autonomous state of Puntland was established there. No war economy developed in the northeast in first years of state collapse mainly because the isolated and neglected region had so few assets to loot. With far fewer armed militias and criminal gangs to cope with, clan elders in Puntland were in a better position to enforce customary law and maintain a modicum of peace and security.

In the northwest, an increasingly robust peace was forged by clan elders in what became the secessionist state of Somaliland. Despite two brief episodes of civil war there in 1994 and 1996,

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ken Menkhaus and Lou Ortmyer, “Somalia: Misread Crises and Missed Opportunities.” In *Preventive Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World: Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized, and Lessons to be Learned*, edited by Bruce Jentleson (New York: Carnegie Endowment, 1999), pp. 211-237.

¹⁰ Mohamed Sahnoun, *Somalia: The Missed Opportunities* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1994).

elders and civic leaders were instrumental in forging and maintaining a peace and demobilizing clan militias.¹¹ The Somaliland state gradually developed governing capacities with only modest external assistance, mostly in the form of support to health and education sectors, municipal governance, and infrastructure.¹² It eventually became a surprisingly successful and open democracy, allowing political disputes to be routinized via elections, a free press, and competitive opposition parties.¹³ Somaliland's impressive level of public security and law and order are not, however, principally the result of the existence of a functional state and police force; it is mainly a reflection of a strong social compact to keep the peace, in which an active civil society, customary law, and clan elders are the main pillars. Even so, the state did play a critical role in preventing armed conflict by devoting most of its budget to paying salaries to clan militia assembled in the new Somaliland army. The army in effect became a large and successful demobilization project after the collapse of the state in 1991.

Key to the success of both Somaliland and Puntland in avoiding the violent melt-down experienced in southern Somalia was the fact that community leaders in both locations were able to prevent serious communal conflicts and the rise of a war economy when the Somali state first collapsed. As a result, they did not have to cope with the much more intractable conflict dynamics faced by civic and political leaders in southern Somalia. One of the core concepts in chaos theory, "sensitive dependence on initial conditions," is especially apt in describing the magnified effect that critical developments played in early 1991 in Somaliland, Puntland, and south-Central Somalia. By the end of 1991, the early successes by clan elders in the northeast and northwest of Somalia put those two regions on a drastically different path than that which south-central Somalia traveled.

Somaliland and Puntland's relative success in keeping the peace since 1991 also challenges the common presumption that a solution to the Somali crisis of armed conflict and state collapse requires a massive injection of foreign aid to give the central government the means to use patronage and build a strong security sector. That may prove to be an effective strategy in Somalia, but the success of Somaliland and Puntland involved very modest government revenues – in the case of Somaliland, only about \$35 million per year. These two polities have constituted minimalist states, focusing only on the most essential functions of a government.

Somaliland and Puntland are also a reminder that successful governance and conflict management initiatives in Somalia are fragile and prone to backsliding. The two polities have intermittently clashed over the contested border areas of Sool and Sanaag, a reminder that the revival of state authority – and ambitions – solves some conflict issues while creating new ones. Puntland has at times experienced worrisome deterioration in governance and public order since 2005 due to a combination of factors – diversion of much of its port revenues to the transitional federal government in 2005-2008, reducing its ability to pay its security forces; the corrosive

¹¹ Ahmed Yusuf Farah with I.M. Lewis, "Somalia: Roots of Reconciliation," (Nairobi: Actionaid, 1993); Mark Bradbury, *Becoming Somaliland: Reconstructing a Failed State* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

¹² Somaliland's status as an unrecognized state limits the types of foreign aid it can receive. It is ineligible for World Bank loans, for instance. Foreign aid to Somaliland has increased since the 1990s, mainly because recovery and development assistance is not possible in highly insecure south-central Somalia.

¹³ Bradbury, *Becoming Somaliland*; Matt Bryden, ed., *Rebuilding Somaliland: Issues and Possibilities* (Lawrenceville NJ: Red Sea Press, 2005); Michael Wall, "The Emergence of a Somali State: Building Peace from Civil War in Somaliland," *African Affairs* 108, 432 (2009), pp. 371-89.

influence of the piracy economy, which reaches into high levels of Puntland society;¹⁴ poor political leadership, which has alienated large parts of the population and made it vulnerable to appeals by shabaab; and the impact of regional and global security interventions in Puntland, which inadvertently created parallel security structures within Puntland's administration. Somaliland's government briefly experienced worrisome backsliding toward authoritarian tendencies in 2006-09, but reversed that trend in 2010 with successful presidential elections, in which the incumbent lost and transferred power to his rival.¹⁵

Changes in conflict dynamics over time. Somalia's conflict dynamics have changed substantially since the early 1990s. From 1989 to 2006, the pattern of armed conflict evolved from grievance-based insurgency to a war economy to a gradual reassertion of social control over armed groups and a reduction in armed conflict. That latter period of "governance without government" ended abruptly in 2006 with the arrival of new and highly destructive conflict dynamics driven by regional and global interests.

In 1993-95, a major UN peace operation, the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), halted the civil war and its war economy. Unfortunately, UNOSOM was drawn into an armed conflict with one resistant clan militia, a war which derailed the mission and meant that UNOSOM would fail in its main objectives of reviving a functional central government and promoting national reconciliation. But it did impose a two year pause in the civil war which allowed for new political, economic, and social dynamics to emerge.

The UNOSOM period holds several important lessons for the study of conflict and development. First, it clearly demonstrated that efforts to promote reconciliation posed a threat to some elites and their constituencies whose interests had been advanced in a context of occupation and banditry. Somalia was a powerful case of the role of spoilers in blocking an international peace-building initiative. Second, UNOSOM was the first and largest of a series of mediation efforts in Somalia in which national reconciliation was conflated with, and reduced to, a power-sharing accord within a transitional government. Power-sharing in the absence of reconciliation has proven to be a difficult recipe in Somalia. Third, the UNOSOM reconciliation initiatives exposed the deeply contentious issue of political representation, a problem discussed in more detail below.¹⁶

UNOSOM's most enduring contribution to peace in Somalia may have been accidental. The enormous sums of money UNOSOM spent in the capital Mogadishu (estimated at \$1.5 billion per year for two years) helped to create space for "legitimate commerce" in construction, procurement, and services. Some militia leaders shifted to business activities, described by some as a shift "from warlord to landlord."¹⁷ In the process, they developed renewed interest in basic public order, helping to usher in a period from 1995 to 2006 of "governance without government" in Somalia.

¹⁴ UN Monitoring Group on Somalia, "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1853 (2008), (26 February 2010), pp. 39-44.

¹⁵ Crisis Group, "Somaliland: A way Out of the Electoral Crisis," African Briefing 67 (7 December 2009).

¹⁶ Pat Johnson, ed., *A History of Mediation in Somalia Since 1988*, (Nairobi: Interpeace, 2009).

¹⁷ Menkhaus, "Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism."

Other factors contributed to the rise of increasingly large and powerful business class in Mogadishu. Somalia's untaxed beach ports and unpoliced borders facilitated the rise of a vibrant and lucrative commercial sector focused on transit trade into East Africa. The revolution in telecommunications technology in the mid-1990s fueled the rise of remittance (hawala) companies and cell phone companies in Somalia. The one million Somalis who fled the civil war as refugees subsequently formed a large diaspora which began sending back remittances eventually reaching about one billion dollars per year. The remittances subsidized local consumption that produced additional business opportunities, especially in private health and education, the service sector, and real estate construction.

This new economy contributed to a decline in armed conflict, which in the post-UNOSOM period was localized, sporadic, and often indistinguishable from armed criminality and cycles of revenge killings. Businesses came to possess large private security forces, reducing opportunities to loot. Business leaders also funded a variety of local systems of governance, including clan-based sharia courts. Many of the sharia court police were ex-militia who were lured away from warlords by the prospect of regular salaries and a respectable job. Clan elders began a slow process of re-asserting some control over armed youth, and nascent civic groups began to function. In some locations, vital social services normally associated with the government were provided either by the private or non-profit sector. An impressive network of primary and secondary schools was established in Mogadishu by the Islamist charity network FPENS;¹⁸ private and charitable medical facilities provided basic health care services in urban areas; and Somali businesses operated seaports, airports, electrical grids, and piped water systems.

Collectively, this produced a fluid, messy patchwork of informal systems of governance and services that reduced incentives for armed conflict and increased social deterrents for violent conflict and criminality. Most of this was driven by a shift in interests on the part of key political and economic elites. But renewed interests in peace, public security, and rule of law -- "governance with a small g" -- was not the same as interest in a revived central government. Some key Somali constituencies viewed peace and governance as desirable but a revived state as risky. Many saw the state as a zero-sum game in which clans which failed to control it would be at the mercy of those which did. Years of predatory and repressive government under Barre reinforced those fears. Some businesspeople feared that the state would nationalize their sectors, or tax them without providing services in return. Still others were expert at risk management and, having made their fortunes in a context of state collapse, preferred "the devil they know" to the uncertainties of revived central government. The longer Somalia's state of state collapse went on, the more this dynamic was reinforced. In effect, this created a unique category of spoilers -- groups unwilling to support state revival out of a sense of risk aversion, but actively supportive of local governance and conflict reduction. Somalia remained a dangerous place, but not nearly as anarchic as was generally believed. This raised a provocative question -- had Somalis learned to cope too effectively with prolonged state collapse, so much so that they had reduced the costs of state collapse to a point where the incentive to take the risks associated with state revival was too low?

¹⁸ Andre Le Sage, "Somalia and the War on Terrorism" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Ph.D. diss, 2004), ch. 6,7.

The steep decline in major armed conflict during this period did not correlate with a drop-off in criminality, though the types of crime shifted. Uncontrolled looting and free-lance assaults were largely a thing of the past, but other forms of organized crime – especially kidnapping, and later piracy – became a growth industry. Charcoal exports, which devastated southern Somali acacia forests and which would have been illegal under a functional government, also exploded during this period. Powerful political leaders and warlords often benefited from these and other illicit activities, and had little incentive to stop them.

Some observers at the time speculated that the incremental growth in social control and business interests in public order might have served as the foundation for a revived central state. We will never know, because Somali conflict dynamics took a dramatic and unexpected turn in 2006 as a result of external factors. The rise of a well-organized Islamist movement in Somalia, the presence of a small number of East African al Qaida figures in Mogadishu, US counter-terrorism operations, polarization over the creation of a deeply problematic Transitional Federal Government (TFG) (which was a government only on paper in 2005-06), and growing Ethiopian involvement in Somalia all helped to create a potentially explosive environment. What ensued was a cascading series of incidents, armed conflict and missed opportunities that propelled Somalia into a horrific spiral of armed conflict. The trigger of the first round of warfare in 2006 was a real estate dispute that spiraled into a full-blown war pitting the Islamic Courts Union and a US-backed militia alliance. The ICU emerged victorious and consolidated control over most of south-central Somalia. For a brief period, it appeared that the ICU would emerge as a government and a victor's peace would be imposed in Somalia. But the ascent of radical elements in the Islamist umbrella movement helped to propel the ICU into a war with neighboring Ethiopia, which routed the ICU forces in December 2006 and militarily occupied Mogadishu. The two year Ethiopian military occupation provoked a predictable insurgency, led by a radical jihadist militia known as the shabaab. The ensuing two year period of insurgency and counter-insurgency introduced the worst levels of armed conflict the country had seen in its twenty year crisis. Improvised explosive devices, suicide bombings, and extensive political assassinations were among the new insurgency tactics. Ethiopian counter-insurgency responses were heavy, and had the effect of emptying whole neighborhoods. The TFG, which assumed a presence in Mogadishu under the protection of the Ethiopian forces, also engaged in military operations against the insurgents. But TFG security forces were poorly controlled and engaged in widespread and serious abuses against civilian populations.¹⁹ By 2008 1.5 million Somalis were internally displaced by the war, and 3.5 million Somalis were in need of emergency assistance, making the country the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The once vibrant commercial economy of Mogadishu was also severely affected, and millions of dollars of investments were lost.

The degree of destruction, displacement, and abuse produced by the counter-insurgency heightened a new element into Somali armed conflict – namely radicalism, manifested in the form of jihadist Islam. Shabaab conflated its hard-line Islamist ideology with Somali nationalist and anti-Ethiopian, anti-Western sentiments. Most Somalis were profoundly angry over what had happened in the country, and some of that anger manifested itself in anti-Ethiopian and anti-American sentiments. The diaspora was mobilized to contribute funds to the shabaab, and many

¹⁹ Crisis Group, "Somalia: To Move Beyond the Failed State" Africa Report no. 147 (23 December 2008).

Somalis who did not share the group's extremist ideology nonetheless supported it as the lead resistance movement.

The Islamist insurgency showed early signs of internal fragmentation, and in 2009 the insurgency has fought among itself on numerous occasions. Clan divisions re-surfaced within the insurgency, and some Islamist militias appear to be gravitating toward economically-motivated behavior – holding individuals for ransom, exacting protection money, and fighting over seaports. This demonstrates how shifts in motives between “greed and grievance” can occur multiple times and in both directions over the course of a long and complex war.

Across the country, the heavy fighting and displacement shattered pre-existing systems of local governance, creating ample opportunities for the revival of criminal violence. Somalia today is as a result one of the most dangerous places in the world for both its citizens and humanitarian aid workers. Kidnapping, already a growing problem by the late 1990s, is an epidemic. Assassinations have targeted prominent Somali elders, professionals, journalists, and civic leaders, forcing much of civic leadership to flee the country. The independent Somali media has been hit especially hard by threats and killings, and today is only a shell of its former self. And Somalia has become the site of the worst piracy epidemic in the world.

To the extent that government security forces have played a significant role in armed violence and criminality against civilians, Somali trepidation about a revived central government has been reinforced. This has widened the gap between external and Somali perceptions about the central state. Donors and aid agencies presume that an effective state structure is essential for economic development and human security, but for many Somalis the state is seen as a potential threat and a source of armed conflict.

Recent developments in Somalia – the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces and a change in political leadership in the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) – have raised hopes that the shabaab insurgency can be contained and the government rejuvenated. The TFG has announced a two year extension in the transitional process, and is receiving external support to its ministries and security sector. At present, however, the TFG remains confined to a portion of Mogadishu under the protection of African Union (AMISOM) peacekeeping forces. The shabaab and other rejectionist Islamist forces control most of southern Somalia and much of the capital.²⁰ Where the TFG has succeeded in extending its influence, it has done so through negotiated alliances with local authorities and militias. This “mediated state” approach, in which a weak central government expands its writ through negotiated relationships with autonomous local authorities, is not unique to Somalia.²¹ Whether it reflects a temporary coping strategy or serves as a possible model of state revival of longer-term significance to Somalia remains a matter of debate and speculation.

²⁰ In early 2011, an AMISOM-led offensive against al-shabaab liberated much of the capital from shabaab control, but it was unclear if the TFG would be able to hold and govern these neighborhoods.

²¹ See for instance the issue of *Afrika Focus* [Ghent] vol. 21, no. 2 (2008) that is devoted to the topic.

Peace-building and State-building: Confidence and Legitimacy in Somalia

Somalia has been the subject of at least a half dozen national reconciliation conferences since 1991, all designed to produce a revived national government. None has succeeded to date. The latest initiative, the Nairobi Peace talks of 2002-04, produced the Transitional Federal Government .

Public confidence in these reconciliation processes have generally been low, and the legitimacy of the accords and the announced governments even lower. Moreover, public confidence in peace processes has declined with each successive failure since 1991, leading to a pronounced level of skepticism and even cynicism about national reconciliation conferences in general. Several factors have contributed to this:

- *Disputed representation.* In the context of complete state collapse and badly fragmented armed groups, the question of who has the right to represent whom has bedeviled Somali national reconciliation processes from the outset. When factional and militia leaders have been the centerpiece, the legitimacy of peace talks has plummeted as most Somalis argue that the “warlords” represent no one but their own narrow interests and are at any rate spoilers with no intent to implement the accords they sign. When clan elders and civic leaders have been convened, peace processes are criticized as naïve and doomed to fail, as the delegates possess no power over armed groups. Somalia lacks anything approaching a “Loya Jirga” – a collection of community representatives who are both legitimate and authoritative. The “4.5 formula” which accords each major clan equal representation in talks has not been an ideal solution; it has only decentralized the debates over legitimate representation, and has been criticized by many Somalis for institutionalizing rather than transcending clannism. The one exception was in Somaliland in 1991, when the clan elders off the northwest held enough authority to convene a grand *shir* or assembly to reach key fundamental decisions enabling the maintenance of peace and creation of the state of Somaliland.
- *Subordination of reconciliation to state-making.* Every Somali national reconciliation process has degenerated into a crude cake-cutting exercise over the apportioning of positions in a proposed transitional government, with little or no effort to reach a genuine reconciliation or address conflict issues. External mediators have at times promoted this problem as they are under pressure to produce an accord and allow power-sharing arrangements to substitute for reconciliation.
- *Lack of local ownership.* Again and again, Somalis have complained that reconciliation processes have been dominated by external actors, who push their own templates and perceived solutions – and in some cases their own interests – to such an extent that Somalis sense little ownership of the process. The fact that the talks are always held outside the country contributes to this problem.

Building Institutions

Somali national leaders in the series of transitional governments declared since 1991 have been mainly focused on the building of one state institution – the security sector – to the exclusion of other governmental bodies. There are legitimate reasons for this – the imperative to project the

government's authority, and provide protection for both the government and citizens. But because of the country's past history, this preoccupation with the security sector has provoked fear among many Somalis that the security sector will be used as a tool of repression and expropriation by whatever group comes to control the state. This fear was reinforced in recent years when TFG security forces became a law unto themselves in the capital.

At the same time, political elites in newly declared governments have devoted most of their energies toward securing foreign aid in the name of state-building. Somali political figures have created and demanded external funding for maximalist state structures far beyond the limited economic means of Somalia. The TFG in 2005 sported over 80 cabinet ministers, including a minister of tourism. Yet state institutions have gone underfinanced and understaffed, leading many Somalis to wonder about the political will of leaders to actually strengthen the state. From this view, state-building has been lucrative as an exercise in attracting (and diverting) aid, but by political elites with little commitment to actually strengthening their own institutions. This is a reminder that while the international community views failed or fragile states as a problem to be solved, that view is not also shared by local political leaders, who may, under certain circumstances, view state failure as a condition that serves their interests.

Even under the robust and repressive government of Siyad Barre, defense and security forces received the bulk of funding, while line ministries were disempowered and intentionally de-institutionalized by Barre, who feared a rival might use a minister as a power base. Formal state structures have rarely been effective in independent Somalia – they have been used to attract aid, and as a useful source of patronage (provision of civil service jobs), but seldom as providers of essential services and public goods. This has been true of the judiciary as well – Somalis have long preferred to handle most crimes and disputes via customary law. In terms of building institutions, Somalia is not so much a site of state “revival” as it is a country where creation of effective state institutions would constitute an entirely new phenomenon. Under these circumstances, Somalis have generally low expectations of the state as a source of services.

One of the unexpected problems of Somalia's long-running experiments with unity, transitional governments is the lack of political space these interim arrangements provide for the rise of a “loyal opposition” – that is, political parties legally and peacefully opposing the government in power but not the state itself. As a result, in Somalia groups are either part of a coalition transitional government or are an armed rejectionist front. This is poor preparation for post-transitional democratic government.

Regional and Global Dimensions

The Somali crisis has taken on important regional and global dimensions in recent years. Ethiopia directly intervened with a major, two year military occupation. Regional rivals Eritrea and Ethiopia have played out a proxy war in Somalia, with Eritrea backing the insurgents while Ethiopia has supported the TFG. The Somali crisis is also interlaced with the ongoing armed insurgency of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) against the Ethiopian government. In this sense, Somalia's crisis is part of a broader, regional conflict complex in which Eritrea and Ethiopia are deeply involved. In more recent times, neighboring Kenya has also become more directly involved in Somali affairs, providing direct support to the TFG. Given the enormous

spillover costs of the Somali crisis, neighboring countries are understandably committed to pursuing their security interests in Somalia. This can, however, lead to a “security dilemma” in which the pursuit of national security by a neighboring country can actually make parts of the Somali population less secure.

Global conflicts have had deeply negative consequences inside Somalia as well. Al Qa’ida has stepped up its support of shabaab, and the US has supported both the TFG and other non-state actors opposed to shabaab. The US has also directed several direct aerial attacks on suspected Al Qa’ida and shabaab figures. The ascendance of this global contest has injected a level of ideological polarization into Somali politics that makes compromise and power-sharing even more improbable.

In addition, the large and powerful Somali diaspora must be counted as a major global player in the Somali crisis, serving at times as a force for peace and at other times a force for war. Because so many of Somalia’s top political, economic, and civil leaders are diaspora members (an estimated two –third of the current TFG cabinet, including the Prime Minister, are diaspora members), it is increasingly difficult to treat the diaspora as separate from Somalia itself. Somalia has become “diasporized” and while it may not exist as a functional sovereign state it is a very much a globalized nation.

Measuring Results and Outcomes. State-building and reconciliation efforts at the national level have been consistent failures, reducing opportunities to measure results. When those opportunities did arise, external measurements of progress were crude and sometimes counter-productive. At times, donors supporting the TFG have measured progress in terms of the number of police and security sector forces trained and equipped instead of focusing on the more fundamental indicator – the relative level of security enjoyed by the Somali people.

Local peace-building projects have long faced a problem both of measurement (how does one gauge consolidation of peace?) and of causality (how can one infer that a particular project has contributed to peace?), and Somalia is no exception. On the whole, donors have been realistic about peace-building, state-building, and “the art of the possible” in Somalia, and have focused on modest goals. The exception in this regard is rule of law projects targeting the formal judicial sector, which has rarely functioned in Somalia and which has always been overshadowed by Somali preference for customary law instead.

One of the biggest challenges to measuring results and outcomes in both peace and governance in Somalia has been the difficulty the international community has had recognizing and understanding the ubiquitous informal political sector that provides most of the day-to-day governance in Somalia but which does not present itself to external actors in their own image and is hence largely invisible to them. To the extent that Somalia’s future success in managing conflict and providing local public order to communities is in the hands of these informal systems of governance, the international community is poorly positioned to understand and measure them, and has demonstrated only scattered interest in liaising with them.

Stress, Capabilities, and Expectations

Stresses and shocks. The above analysis provides ample evidence that that Somali society has had to endure an extraordinary level of stress, at every level of life. Households have faced enormous difficulties maintaining viable livelihoods and accessing basic services. Communities have suffered chronic and deep levels of insecurity borne of war, violent criminality, and mass displacement. Rural populations face worsening resource pressures and shortages of water and pasture. Local authorities and civic leaders confront new and unprecedented levels of communal violence and armed groups beyond their control. And the country as a whole has had to deal with the shock and humiliation of twenty years of state collapse, the exodus of a million citizens as refugees, external military occupation, chronic dependence on external humanitarian aid, and polarization along clan and ideological lines. Many of these stresses have been mutually reinforcing, creating vicious circles that deepen the crisis and render potential solutions more elusive. As in any protracted crisis, spoilers abound. Some Somali and external actors have come to benefit economically or politically from continued state collapse and armed conflict, and have worked against conflict resolution and revival of rule of law. This serves as a reminder that the stresses and shocks of the Somali crisis have been shouldered very unevenly in the country. For most, it has been an unmitigated disaster; for others, an opportunity.

Importantly, some of the most costly and ambitious efforts by the international community to ameliorate the Somali crisis have at times been a major source of stress. External humanitarian, development, and state-building assistance have introduced resources into a context of extreme scarcity and competition, and in consequence have inadvertently contributed to communal and political conflict in some instances. Introduction of external military forces, whether in the form of UN or African Union peacekeepers or as part of an intervention by a neighboring state, has been important in protecting aid and providing some level of stabilization, but has also proven to be highly stressful and in every case has eventually served as a lightning rod for armed opposition. Predictably, Somali narratives about the cycle of violence that has plagued their country tend to emphasize external interference as a major driver of violence and state collapse, while external narratives tend to cast international interventions in Somalia as well-intentioned but frustrated by intractable Somali conflict dynamics.

Capability. That Somali households and communities have survived this history of stress and shocks is a testament to their extraordinary coping mechanisms, adaptability, and entrepreneurship. But even these coping mechanisms have their limits, and some have been overtaxed and overwhelmed at times. This analysis points to a number of especially salient capacities to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict:

- Informal governance systems. Hybrid governance arrangements exist across the country and have helped manage conflict and provide basic order and security. These governance arrangements rely heavily on customary law negotiated by clan elders, but also draw on civic leaders, sharia courts, businesspeople, and municipalities.
- Business networks and interests. Not all businesspeople are a force for peace and governance; some are part of a war economy and are spoilers. But as a whole Somalia's commercial elite are pivotal in building alliances across clan and conflict lines in order to secure movement of goods and protect fixed assets. They also embody the impressive

entrepreneurism that has allowed the country to excel in money transfers, telecommunication, and cross-border trade despite state collapse.

- Islam. Islamism is ascendant in Somalia, as Somalis search for a body of laws, norms, and institutions to manage state collapse and armed violence. A small percentage of Somali Islamists embrace jihadism and extremism, but most Somalis are convinced that some form of political Islam is part of a solution to the country's crisis, and not a source of radicalism.
- Remittances. Somalia would be in a state of complete economic collapse were it not for the estimated one billion dollars per year sent back to the country by the one million or more Somalis living abroad.
- Political culture. Somalis possess a political culture that possesses a strong streak of pragmatism and an emphasis on negotiation and bargaining. This has been both a source of strength and weakness in the face of prolonged armed violence and state collapse.
- Mobility. Somalis are extraordinarily mobile, willing to relocate within the country, to neighboring states, or further abroad in search of new opportunities. This has been a critical survival tool.

Expectations. Expectations of the state vary dramatically across Somali society. Among the Somali political elite, expectations of the state are unrealistically high and framed by hopes that a revived central government will serve to attract copious levels of foreign aid and serve as a generous patronage machine. While some in the Somali public share this inflated view of a future state's ability to generate jobs and wealth, most Somalis have very low expectations of revived government to provide security services. The younger half of the population has no living memory of a functioning central government at all, and knows only a context of state collapse. The older half of the population recalls the repression of the Barre government in the 1970s and 1980s and is thus guarded about state revival. It is noteworthy that even in Somaliland, public expectations of the central government are not high.