Political and Strategic Changes in the Indian Ocean Region: Implications for Australia

Samina Yasmeen
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The Somali Crisis and the Post-Cold War Order

Samuel M. Makinda

Due to persistent and grim television pictures about starvation in Somalia in mid-1992, the United States, the European Community, Australia and other developed nations decided to provide relief assistance. The Somali tragedy had been known for several years, but the United Nations and the developed world did not pay much attention to it. Understandably, some critics have blamed the international community for acting too late. However, early in 1992, the UN had been involved in arranging a ceasefire between the warring factions in Somalia. The UN Secretary-General, Dr Boutros Boutrous-Ghali, a former Egyptian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, who has had a long-standing interest in the Horn of Africa, despatched an Assistant Secretary-General, James Jonah, to Mogadishu, the Somali capital, in January 1992 to try to persuade the warring factions to negotiate peace. Indeed, the UN Security Council approved a resolution in January 1992 imposing an arms embargo on Somalia and calling on the combatants to permit humanitarian assistance to reach those most in need. The United Somali Congress (USC) factions in Mogadishu accepted a ceasefire in New York in mid-February 1992, but as they had done with other ceasefires, they immediately flouted it. The UN subsequently warned them in early March that the international community had become cynical of their ceasefire violations and that Somalia might be abandoned altogether. By the end of March 1992, the Somali catastrophe had been put on the back burner by the UN largely because the permanent members of the Security Council, especially the UK, the US and France were more interested in the crisis in the Balkans.

This chapter argues that the crisis in Somalia is a consequence of both internal and external factors. Anarchy in Somalia is due to domestic problems like clan rivalry, a centralized and corrupt political system and undeveloped public institutions. However, superpower involvement in the country during the Cold War and the post-Cold War indifference by Western powers have also played roles in the crisis.

Somalia achieved international prominence in the mid-1970s when it
became a focal point of US-Soviet geo-strategic competition. The Soviet Union had established a naval base at the port of Berbera in the early 1970s, and by 1975, the Soviet base was regarded as a threat to Western security interests in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean regions. Somalia's role in superpower relations changed significantly in 1977. Earlier that year, the United States, which had maintained a military communications base at Kagnew in Ethiopia since the 1950s, pulled out of Ethiopia, thereby enabling the USSR to move in. At the same time, Somalia invaded Ethiopia, and the Soviet decision to help Ethiopia angered the Somalis, who expelled Soviet military advisers and closed down Soviet military facilities in the country. In 1979, following the revolution in Iran (which resulted in Washington losing tracking stations in Iran) and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the US tried once again to increase its military presence in the Horn. It improved its relations with Somalia and in 1980 took over the former Soviet base at Berbera.

The tragedy of Somalia illustrates three important points. First, the withdrawal of the US and former Soviet Union from the Horn since the late 1980s has led to the further marginalization of African affairs, which were already on the periphery of world politics. The Horn had little intrinsic strategic value outside of the Cold War, and even its proximity to the Gulf, which had previously underlined the region’s strategic value, is now of limited significance. Second, the crisis provides a clear example of how some security problems have been aggravated rather than mitigated by the end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of the superpowers from developing countries. Third, Somalia’s anarchy demonstrates that security problems in developing countries stem fundamentally not from external threats, but from internal sources, especially weak state structures, a lack of social cohesion and poverty. It is further proof that political stability depends on a sound economy, and vice versa.

Clanism and the Political Process

The carnage, chaos and sheer madness of the past few years stem from the structure of the Somali society, which is dominated by clan rivalry. For generations, the single most important factor in Somali society has been the clan. Although all Somalis belong to one ethnic group and enjoy a sense of common identity based on a shared culture, clan loyalty often undercuts the sense of shared nationhood. Somalia’s social and economic activities have traditionally stemmed from lineage systems based on one of the six major clan families – Darod, Digil, Dir, Hawiye, Issaq and Rahanwein. The six family groups are further split into smaller clans and lineages, which often engage in feuds. For instance, the Hawiye clan-family consists of six sub-clans, two of which are sharply divided, namely the Abgal sub-clan of interim President Ali
Mahdi Mohammed and the Habre Gedir sub-clan of General Mohammed Farrah Aideed. The Darod group includes the Dolbahante, Majerteen, Marehan and Ogadeni clans.

Former dictator General Mohammed Siad Barre, who ruled Somalia from October 1969 after staging a military coup, sought to transform Somali nationalism from its old segmentary kind to a modern organic mode. In the early 1970s, he banned clanism, prohibited any reference to clans and adopted 'scientific socialism' in an effort to unite the nation. However, lineages have continued to determine the course of Somalia's political development. Clan and lineage affiliations also have been vital in obtaining jobs, services and favours. Indeed, it was clan feuds that brought down Barre's government in January 1991.

Clan rivalry intensified in the late 1980s because of corruption in the government and the increasing economic malaise. Corruption was rampant because state structures were undeveloped and weak, democratic institutions were absent and there was no accountability on the part of political leaders. Economic problems in Somalia were also aggravated by Barre's misguided macroeconomic policies, by a lack of technical expertise and by poor project selection and implementation. The foreign aid Somalia received was not invested in profitable ventures, and by the late 1980s, the Somali economy had nearly ground to a halt.

Somalia's relative stability in the 1970s and early 1980s depended on Barre's skilful manipulation of both domestic and external politics. At the international level, the Cold War gave Barre some leverage through which he obtained substantial economic and military assistance, first from the Soviet Union and later from the United States. At the domestic level, he maintained power by often suppressing critics and detaining opponents; by playing on clan interests and rivalries; and, occasionally, by buying out opposition groups with cash. However, by the late 1980s, with the waning of the Cold War, Barre's external leverage had gone and internally his military muscle had weakened due to inter-clan rivalries. It had also become increasingly obvious that he had neither the skill to manipulate sectional interests nor the vision to lead the country quickly out of its political and economic doldrums.1

Barre had started as a nationalist who had great regional ambitions. Through intense radio propaganda and the Orientation Centres that were set up throughout the country in the 1970s with Soviet assistance, Barre had sought to replace archaic and divisive lineage loyalty by revolutionary allegiance to the nation; but he had little success. In fact, Barre himself was influenced by kinship considerations. He relied on his Marehan clan and most of his trusted ministers were drawn from it. He also established close links with two other clans: the Ogadeni, where his mother came from, and the Dolbahante, the clan of one of his sons-in-law, Ahmed Suleiman. Suleiman was at various times head
of the National Security Services, Interior Minister and an Assistant Secretary General of the ruling party. Barre’s inner circle of advisers also came from these three clans, and in the early 1970s, his government was often disparagingly referred to as MOD (i.e. Marehan, Ogadeni and Dolbahante).

At the same time, and until the late 1980s, pan-Somali nationalism had been the unifying and legitimizing principle, and every Somali leader was judged on the basis of his willingness and ability to pursue the Greater Somalia goal. The Ogaden region of Ethiopia, inhabited predominantly by the Ogadenis, has been the main target of this nationalism. From 1960 to 1967, three Somali prime ministers, all from the Darod group, laid claim to the Ogaden. Under Prime Minister Ibrahim Egal (1967-69), an Issaq with few ties to the Ogaden, Somalia sought a rapprochement with Ethiopia, but Egal was overthrown by Said Barre.

Ironically, the opposition to Barre, which later contributed to the present anarchy in Somalia, increased after it was clear that he could not unite all ethnic Somalis under one flag. The first signs of disaffection with Barre’s leadership came out in 1978, following his failure to take the Ogaden region after Somalia’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1977. The war with Ethiopia had been very popular, but the defeat at the hands of Ethiopia (helped by the Soviets and Cubans), was demoralizing and led to an upsurge of clan antagonisms as each group sought scapegoats to explain the failure. That, in turn, led to an abortive coup in April 1978. Some of the officers involved, mainly from the Majerteen clan (the only clan from the Darod family that Barre had excluded from central power), subsequently formed the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) which, ironically, was given sanctuary by Ethiopia, long Somalia’s bete noir. By seeking asylum in Ethiopia, the Majerteen officers signalled the disintegration of Somali national unity. The Ethiopians, on the other hand, welcomed the defectors in the hope of using them to undermine Somali national solidarity.

The strongest challenge to Barre’s rule took place in May 1988, one month after the signing of the Somali-Ethiopian peace agreement. The accord, which called for demilitarization of their common border and effectively amounted to Somalia’s renunciation of its claims to the Ogaden region, was designed to demonstrate that Somalia had eschewed its earlier policies of destabilizing its neighbours. But it was also dictated by clan and specifically family interests in Mogadishu. Following Barre’s car accident in May 1986, some members of the Marehan clan started to feel insecure at the prospect of another clan taking power. There were also rivalries within Barre’s family and clan as to who should succeed him. The ensuing disagreements led to the collapse of the MOD clan alliance. At the same time, some prominent members of the Marehan clan felt they should seek Ethiopia’s cooperation to put an end to guerrilla activity from the SSDF and the Somali National Movement (SNM).
Hence the peace accord. The agreement was resented by the Ogadenis, then the dominant clan in the army, who felt their homeland had been abandoned and directed their anger towards Barre. By the late 1980s, competition for power and wealth took the form of shifting alliances and conflicts between lineages and clans.

For more than 14 years, Barre had ruled through the Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party (SSRP), of which he was the Secretary General. The SSRP was established in 1976 with Soviet and East German help. The party, initially based on Marxist-Leninist principles, was hierarchically organized, with a Politburo and a Central Committee, of which Barre was the chairman. Theoretically the party was the supreme authority of political and socio-economic leadership in Somalia, but in practice, supremacy rested with Barre. However, Barre's main power base until the late 1980s had been the army. Using the army, the secret police and the party, Barre sought to maintain an autocratic and centralized system which was alien to the Somali society, with its ever-splitting clans and lineages.

Due to increased domestic and external pressure on Barre in the late 1980s, he agreed in August 1989 to work on a new constitution, that would have created a multi-party system in 1991. Accordingly, in November 1989 Barre set up a constitutional review committee consisting of seven Somalis and six Italians, to draft a new constitution. The draft constitution was ready by January 1990 and the Barre government subsequently prepared a law on political parties and another on elections; but it was clear that there was no political will on the part of the government to carry through the process. Eventually, Barre announced in June 1990 plans for a multi-party system and promised to hold elections in February 1991. The multi-party constitution was approved by the People's Assembly (Parliament) in October 1990. This was subject to a national referendum. However, as internal pressure against Barre intensified, his government announced on 26 December 1990 that political parties had been legalized with immediate effect. Barre's action came too late however, and he was swept away before that could happen.

By the time Siad Barre was toppled, the country had been sliding towards anarchy for more than three years. From the late 1980s, Barre was often referred to as the mayor of Mogadishu, because that was the only areas of the country he controlled effectively until late 1990. Even then, in the final two years, Barre was under intense pressure from his own family and clan to step down. The military, which had served as one of Barre's pillars of power, had disintegrated into what looked like clan militias. The civil service was totally demoralized and Barre's Cabinet functioned like a federation of clans in which power was commensurate with loyalty to the President. The economy was in shambles, political institutions had collapsed, corruption was rampant and clan rivalry was intense. The situation in Somalia was so appalling that few people
had any illusion that Barre’s fall from power would bring an immediate end to the suffering.

The Post-Barre Leadership

The crisis in Somalia called for an efficient and disciplined government, but the resistance groups which were opposed to Barre’s rule mirrored the anarchic conditions of his regime, thereby ensuring that the immediate post-Barre era would be chaotic. All political groups in the country are based on clans, and the main organizations in the 1990-91 period were: the Somali National Movement (SNM), established in 1981 by the Issaq of northern Somalia; the United Somali Congress (USC), formed in 1989 by the Hawiye of central Somalia; and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), created in 1989 by the Ogadenis. Increasingly every public issue in Somalia came to be defined in terms of lineages and clans. It was, therefore, not surprising that when Barre was toppled by the USC in January 1991, the country was plunged into deeper problems.

Barre’s successor, Ali Mahdi Mohammed, supported by the local wing of the USC, has had no resources, no army, no police force and not even a civil service with which to establish a functioning government. Although he claimed to be President of the entire country, he did not control even the capital, Mogadishu, for more than a few months. In the confusion that preceded and followed the overthrow of the Barre regime, government offices and foreign embassies were looted, hospitals and schools were ravaged and water and power supply in Mogadishu were disrupted. Under Barre, public institutions were abused and weakened; under Mahdi there are no institutions worth the name. Having toppled Barre, Mahdi and his supporters have watched helplessly as Somalia has disintegrated as a result of mutual mistrust, years of corruption and inter-clan fighting.

Mahdi took office when clan rivalry was so strong that there appeared to be little common ground between the major clans, especially Hawiye, Issaq, Ogadeni and Marehan. He was also installed in office in controversial circumstances. His appointment was subsequently contested by the SNM, the SPM and some sections of the USC, especially the group aligned with General Mohammed Farah Aideed. General Aideed leads a USC faction which had signed an agreement with the SNM and the SPM in August 1990 to coordinate their military efforts against Barre. The overthrow of Barre had been delayed until January 1991 simply because alliances between power-seeking clan leaders could not endure. It was partly due to the SNM’s perception that there would be no prospect of reaching a compromise with other groups that northern Somalia (the former British Somaliland) seceded in May 1991.

It is largely because of intense inter-clan fighting that the political process
in Somalia has become extremely unpredictable. Owing to intra-clan fighting among the Hawiye, there is no effective government in Mogadishu, as President Mahdi controls only the northern part of the city. He had promised in early 1991 to rule with justice, democracy and equality, but, in the light of the prevailing anarchy, he had been too optimistic. A member of parliament before Barre’s coup of 1969, Mahdi was out of active politics for more than two decades, during which time he had concentrated on business activities. The owner of one of the biggest hotels in Mogadishu – the Makkah el Mukarram – he was one of the main sponsors of the USC Mogadishu branch. He is also a founding member of the Manifesto Group, which emerged in May 1990 with the circulation of a set of political demands. The manifesto, signed by 115 prominent personalities, including politicians, business people and professionals from different clans, was a last-ditch attempt to persuade Barre to hand over power.

Mahdi’s embattled government is dominated by the Hawiye, although the Ogadenis and the Issaqs were also given important Cabinet posts; but this is a Cabinet that does not function. Mahdi has repeatedly pledged to maintain a broad-based government of national reconciliation and a multi-party system, but persistent political squabbles have prevented the realization of these objectives. In fact, Mahdi’s primary concern has become how he can survive as interim President until 1993, rather than what needs to be done to stabilize Somalia.

The post-Barre leadership had been expected to carry through political reforms started by Barre, but unless clans agree to unite, this will remain a forlorn hope. Mahdi’s actions since coming to power have been influenced largely by a group of Abgal Hawiye personalities who were signatory to the May 1990 manifesto, and who later formed a group that called itself the USC executive committee. The committee operated like a guerrilla group, with financial backing from Mahdi. Like Barre’s regime, Mahdi’s team has no legitimacy or popular mandate. In fact, Mahdi is a President without a state, people or a government.

Militias and Civil War

Numerous clan-based militia groups, armed with Kalashnikovs and other weapons, are largely to blame for anarchy in Somalia. Indeed, it is true to argue that ‘Somali children know as much about weapons as Western children know about computer games’. Since 1988, Somalia has represented a classic example of Clausewitz’s tenet that war is politics by other means. For several years before Barre’s fall, the Somali government’s principal preoccupation had been the management of civil war; the opposition had been the insurgency; and guerrilla activity had become the only effective way of making the government accountable. After Barre’s departure, the situation in Somalia became much
worse than it ever was in Nicaragua or Cambodia or Angola in the late 1980s, when guerrilla action had become the normal political activity in these countries. 9

The anti-Barre resistance groups included the Issaq-dominated SNM, which bore the brunt of the assault on the Barre government, especially after May 1988; the Hawiye-based USC; and the Ogadeni-based SPM. The Hawiye, the largest clan in Somalia, played virtually no role in the fight against Barre until late 1990. However, a few Hawiye fighters had joined the SNM in the mid-1980s. In fact, the USC was launched by Ali Mohammad Wardigly, who had been the vice-chairman of the SNM from 1984 to 1987. Wardigly died in April 1990, leaving a power vacuum which neither interim President Ali Mahdi nor his nemesis General Aideed could fill. The Gadabursi clan in November 1989 had formed the Somali Democratic Alliance (SDA), while the Marjetteen-based Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), which was established in the late 1970s, was virtually moribund by the late 1980s; but it was revived shortly before Barre’s fall from power.

Following an agreement by the SNM, the SPM and the USC in August 1990 to coordinate their efforts, Barre’s fall became inevitable. A peace plan proposed by Italy on 9 January 1991, which would have left Barre as head of state while relinquishing most of his powers to a government of national unity in preparation for a peace conference and United Nations-supervised elections, was rejected by the USC. Two weeks later, on 23 January 1991, the USC announced in Rome that it had formed a national salvation committee with three other groups: SPM, SSDF and SDA.

As the strongest guerrilla group, the SNM was generally expected to form the backbone of the immediate post-Barre government, but it did not move to Mogadishu in the final hours of the Barre regime. This was because the final assault on Barre came earlier than expected. The trigger was a fight between the Abgal and Habr Gedir supporters of the different USC factions in northeastern Mogadishu. Barre’s security forces tried to take advantage of this fighting to destroy the USC, but intervention by government forces prompted the Abgal group to bring in about 300 guerrillas who ambushed and attacked military officers. The government’s response was quite severe, and thereby set off a popular uprising.

This forced the USC to bring in the rest of its forces long before it had planned to do so. Commander of the USC executive committee, General Mohammed Galaal (Abgal) and 1,500 men, who had been operating about 50 kilometres from Mogadishu, arrived at the end of the first week of January 1991. But it was not until more heavily armed men of the SPM under Colonel Ahmed Omar Jess arrived on 23 January 1991 that the guerrillas were able to force Barre out of the military bunker near the airport, where he had been lodging for several weeks. The USC executive committee had initially planned
to re-open discussions with the well-armed Hawiye guerrillas operating very successfully in central Somalia in conjunction with the SNM under Aideed’s command, but that was overtaken by events.

Barre’s defeat in late January 1991 accelerated the disintegration of Somalia for several reasons. First, the anti-Barre opposition forces had only one thing in common: the defeat of Barre. Beyond that, they had no common ground and hated each other virtually as much as they did Barre. Second, when Barre was overthrown, power was immediately assumed by the Hawiye, a clan that played virtually no role in the anti-Barre struggle until a few months before his fall. Third, by appointing an interim President without consulting other groups, the USC went against the August 1990 agreement to consult with other groups.

Barre’s fall was followed by the further fragmentation of society and the proliferation of clan-based political groups, each seeking a share of the political plums. As there are no institutions for resolving conflict, fighting has been almost inevitable. Around Mogadishu, the USC has been fighting on several fronts, including its breakaway groups. Two factions within the USC, the Habr Gedir group led by Aideed and the Abgal group of President Mahdi, each claim to have the mandate to form a post-Barre government. The uneasy relations between Aideed and Mahdi were exacerbated in July 1991. At the USC annual congress on 4 July 1991, Aideed was elected USC chairman with 70% of the vote. Later in the month, the national reconciliation conference, held in Djibouti from 15-21 July 1991, confirmed Mahdi as interim President for two years. However, Aided wanted both jobs. In late 1991, factional fighting was so intense that Mahdi’s supporters had to withdraw from southern Mogadishu.

The USC has also had to deal with contentions by the SPM and other political groups, which have been dissatisfied with the post-Barre power-sharing arrangements. In early 1991, some reports suggested that the SPM had amalgamated with other groups from the Darod clan-family, including some Barre supporters, to form the Somali National Front. After taking power, Mahdi had proposed a conference of national reconciliation for 28 February 1991, and later postponed it to 14 March, but other political groups refused to attend. The conference was finally convened in two stages by Djibouti’s President Hassan Gouled in June and July 1991. The USC, SPM, SSDF and the Somali Democratic Movement participated in the June 1991 talks. Those in July 1991 were attended by the same four groups, plus the Gadabursi-based SDA and the Issa-based United Somali Front. The six groups were still so divided that it was hard to see how they would coordinate their programs, but for a start they agreed to re-adopt the 1960 Somali constitution.

The civil war, and the nature of weapons available to combatants, have had a damaging effect on social and economic life in Somalia. Under Barre, it led to high military expenditure and was, therefore, a drain on resources that
would otherwise have been available for infrastructure and developing public sector services. The civil war has also caused the destruction of the physical infrastructure, especially bridges, airports, schools and hospitals. The Somalis, who used to stab each other with knives in the past, now have sophisticated weapons. Moreover, people who have been at war for extended periods of time often find it hard to adapt to peace-time normalcy, and there are many Somalis in that category. Most of these, including children, now feel more comfortable with a Kalashnikov than a ploughshare. Indeed, Somalia has many people who have been uprooted by the civil war and who know only how to fight. Such individuals have no respect for law and order.

Marriage Breakup: The Issaq Secession

One of the by-products of the Somali crisis has been the secession of northern Somalia, formerly British Somaliland. Its dominant clan, the Issaq group, which comprises about 20% of Somalia’s population, presented the strongest challenge to Barre’s leadership from 1988 until his departure. Their main political organization, the SNM, war formed in 1981 and nurtured by the Ethiopian government. The SNM’s aim was to overthrow Barre and establish a more democratic system in Somalia, but the fact that the organization was not heavily involved in the final assault denied it a chance to form the immediate post-Barre government. Rather than continue the civil war against a new regime, the SNM leader, Abdurahman Ahmed Ali, proclaimed the ‘Republic of Somaliland’ on 18 May 1991, with himself as President. The move towards secession was taken after the failure of mediation efforts by Egypt, Djibouti and Italy to secure increased participation by the SNM and other groups in the Mahdi government. However, secession was not unanimously supported by the SNM leadership, some of whom regarded the move as not final, but as a step towards renegotiating the 1960 unification arrangement. The future reincorporation of the ‘Republic of Somaliland’ into the rest of Somalia would require a redressing of past and existing injustices in the country, but there is no government in Mogadishu capable of doing so.

The secession of the ‘Republic of Somaliland’ can be understood against the background of several factors. First, for many years, the Issaq had not had good relations with Mogadishu. They had complained repeatedly that more than 90% of Somalia’s development took place in the south, and that since independence the southern clans occupied most of the senior government posts. Second, some of the Issaq elders hated Barre for having overthrown the only Issaq Prime Minister, Ibrahim Egal, in 1969. Third, in the 1980s the Issaqs endured harsh military rule, which only served to increase their disaffection towards the Mogadishu government. Fourth, the Issaq clan’s colonial background under the British set it apart; the rest of Somalia was an Italian
colony until World War II, when it became a UN trust territory under British control. The Issaqs were never satisfied with the 1960 union arrangements.

The break-up of old unions around the world in the early 1990s caused some Issaqs and leaders of the SNM to demand revision of the 1960 union arrangements. However, like most Somali groups, the SNM is divided along ideological lines, with differences between the liberals, Islamic fundamentalists and traditionalists. Whether the Issaqs will be more united in the 'Republic of Somaliland' is hard to predict. Economically the territory might outperform the rest of Somalia, as it has relatively more rainfall than much of Somalia. Moreover, Somalia's past export earnings derived from the sale of about 650,000 sheep annually from the north to Saudi Arabia. Due to this agricultural potential, the 'Republic of Somaliland' might recover economically much faster than the rest of Somalia.

The secession has serious national and regional implications. The SNM is predominantly, although not exclusively, Issaq. An independent 'Republic of Somaliland', dominated by Issaqs or the SNM, will be strongly resented by the other northern clans, especially the Dolbahante and Gadabursi. The SNM leader Ahmed Ali formed an interim government in mid-1991 and pledged to have multi-party elections within two years. Although the majority of Cabinet ministers in the interim government were Issaqs, its total membership was carefully balanced between the main Issaq sub-clans and other clans in the territory. However, given the general disaffection in Somali society, it would not be surprising if the 'Republic of Somaliland' came to mirror the anarchic conditions of the rest of Somalia.

As of late 1992, the 'Republic of Somaliland' had not been formally recognized by any country. Its immediate neighbours, Ethiopia and Djibouti, were worried about the possible effects that secession would have on their internal stability. Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia have, in particular, campaigned against the international recognition of the territory. Since the secession went against Article III of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which calls for the preservation of African state boundaries as they were at the end of colonial rule, and appeared to set a precedent for other contentious problems in the rest of Africa, the new republic seems unlikely to find allies on the continent. The 'Republic of Somaliland' might also seek membership of the Arab League as a way of maximizing its chances of obtaining economic assistance, but there is no sign that the League is looking forward to admitting the territory to its membership. Saudi Arabia clandestinely provided limited support for the SNM when it was fighting against Barre, but whether the Saudis are keen to support a secessionist state is not clear.
External Involvement

During the Cold War, the superpowers had obvious reasons for involvement in the Third World and they were sometimes perceived as the sources of uncertainty and instability in developing countries. Following the collapse of Communism, Moscow has come to compete with developing countries for limited resources in Western capitals. It has also become clear that most developing countries cannot stand on their own without foreign assistance. Somalia is an example of a country where outside involvement is necessary not just to provide food, clothing and medical services to the people, but also to help establish institutions of a modern state. Whilst it is true that a complete return to normalcy in the country will depend on the Somalis themselves, they cannot now do so without external support, because they lack the necessary political, economic and physical infrastructures.

Somalia's problems stem from structural factors and Siad Barre's rule; but they were exacerbated in the late 1980s, when Somalia was deserted by friends and neglected by all Western powers, except Italy. The United States, which had provided the Siad Barre regime with economic and military assistance from 1980, terminated aid to Somalia in the wake of human rights violations in mid-1989. The US subsequently urged major political and economic reforms as a prerequisite for the resumption of aid. The European Community also cut aid in 1989 in order to pressure Barre to liberalize the political system. Italy made no secret of the fact that it wanted the United Kingdom, then wrongly perceived to be close to the Somali National Movement guerrilla group, to be involved in mediation efforts. However, London did not want to have anything to do with the peace process in Somalia because it had no economic interests in the country.

By 1990, Italy was the only Western power working with Somalia in the hope of containing the civil war, reforming the political system and putting the economy on a sound footing. Against all evidence of an impending political and economic disaster, Italians retained a degree of optimism about prospects for Somalia. The main Italian argument in the 1989-90 period was the the Barre regime was finished, but that there was a need for the Western world to work with it to create the political structures which would provide the chance, even if slim, that a successor regime would be coherent and strong enough to govern. However, the Italians sometimes confused hope with analysis and their efforts failed largely because of Somalia's complex political problems, feuding clans, rampant corruption and a deepening economic malaise. Independent observers believe that if the US and the EC had directed some efforts towards mediation in 1989-90, the crisis could have been averted. However, revolutions in Eastern Europe and the end of Communism meant that major Western powers redirected their efforts towards Eastern Europe to the neglect of Africa.
Somalia's situation could have been helped by the Arab League and the Organization of African Unity. A few Arab countries, including Libya and the United Arab Emirates provided some limited support in the 1989-90 period, but the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 helped shift international attention away from the situation in the Horn. Since 1991, Egypt and Djibouti have tried to negotiate peace in Somalia, but they have been unsuccessful. The Arab League, the Islamic Conference Organization and the OAU also tried unsuccessfully to mediate the conflicts in the country in early 1992. Mediation efforts in Somalia have failed for several reasons: the various clans and sub-clans still hate each other vehemently; the clan leaders or war-lords have virtually no legitimacy and their supporters can abandon them at any time; and the number of clan militias or resistance groups keeps rising.

The most effective outside actors that have done anything in the past to alleviate the suffering in Somalia have been non-governmental organizations, which have included the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children Fund, CARE, World Vision, Oxfam and Medecins sans Frontieres and several others. These groups ensured that humanitarian assistance reached those most in need. Because of their neutrality, NGOs have been able to provide assistance to all sides in the conflict. However, by mid-1992 the situation in Mogadishu had forced some NGOs to hire militias to escort their supplies.

The deterioration of the security situation in mid-1992 prompted the UN, the United States, the UK, France, Italy, Australia and other industrialized countries to step in and provide relief assistance. The United States military started to fly an estimated 145,000 tonnes of food from Mombasa, Kenya, to Somalia from August 1992. The concentration on relief assistance without due consideration for structural reforms has meant that despite the efforts, the causes of the present crisis will remain.

Conclusion

A beneficiary of Cold War tensions between the superpowers, Somalia has become a victim of the general indifference of Western nations to the plight of developing countries in the 'new world order'. The management of Somalia's conflict since 1989 has required outside mediation, but the country has been of no strategic significance to the industrialized world. The revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989, the Gulf war of 1990-91 and the Yugoslav crises since 1991 have helped to shift international attention away from Somalia's catastrophe. Thus the current Somali crisis is a consequence of internal structural factors, Siad Barre's 21-year rule and rapid changes in the wider international system.

Since August 1992, the industrialized world's response to the crisis has concentrated on relief assistance. They might flood Somalia with grain to remove the incentive to kill for food. However, the Somali tragedy calls for
support beyond compassion. The country needs technical and economic assistance to address the structural problems and the broader political and economic malaise. The ongoing anarchy has frightened away potential investors and without foreign investment, Somalia's economy has no chance of immediate recovery.

The most explosive issue remains inter-clan rivalry, which can be resolved only when clan leaders and other warlords agree to unite and persuade their supporters to do the same. This will be predicated on a re-establishment of law and order and other institutions for resolving conflict; but the warlords lack legitimacy and cannot even reach a consensus on the directions of change. As long as anarchy lasts, most militia groups will continue to view anyone outside their own groups as a potential enemy.

Barre's successors have the difficult task of conciliating between clan rivalry, liberalizing the political system and creating conditions which are conducive to foreign investment. Without internal order and a legal structure, prospective aid donors and investors would be reluctant to commit their resources. Thus Somalia has been caught in a vicious circle of extreme poverty and anarchy.

Endnotes

1. See Samuel M. Makinda, Security in the Horn of Africa, Adelphi Paper No.269, (London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1992), pp.24-37. This chapter does not discuss the state of Somalia's economy because there has been so much disruption that one can describe Somalia's economy only in terms of the past and its potential.

2. The Greater Somalia concept stemmed from the fact that colonialism split ethnic Somalis into five states: French Somaliland, later the French Territory of the Afars and Issas (now Djibouti); Ethiopia; Kenya; Italian Somaliland; and British Somaliland. The latter two united at the time of independence in 1960 to form the present-day Somalia, which subsequently sought in the 1960s and 1970s to 'liberate' all ethnic Somalis and unite them into one nation. The centrifugal forces are now so strong that even the 1960 union cannot hold.

3. I.M. Lewis, 'The Ogaden and the Fragility of Somali Segmentary Nationalism', African Affairs, Vol.88, No.354, October 1989, p.573. After its defeat in the 1977-78 Ogaden war, the Somali army started to experience some organizational problems. As a result of war-time losses, and owing to the increase in the size of the army, discipline, even among officers, deteriorated.

4. See, for instance, Michael Dunn, 'Power Struggle in Somalia', Defence and Foreign Affairs, December 1986, p.31. By 1989 the power struggle had split Barre's family, as both his son and his half-brother sought to replace him as head of state.
5. For a well-informed discussion of the civil war in Somalia during the Barre era, see, for instance, a two-part special report, 'Somalia: Political and Military Outlook', *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, 24 March 1990 and 7 April 1990.


9. The Somali crisis has caused more than one million refugees to seek shelter in neighbouring Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and Yemen. International relief agencies estimate that about one fourth of Somalia's population fled the country between January 1991 and August 1992. The number of deaths is not known and will probably never be known, but by June 1992, nearly 500 Somalis died daily from starvation, lack of medical care and fighting.