

**Somalia Security Shaping Factors:
Colonial Legacy, Global Conflicts
and State Making Process**



Salad Sheikh Yusuf Addow

Abstract

This study aims to address the incessant security threats that Somalia has been facing for the last five decades. Exclusively, the article attempts to explore and stretch a substantial understanding of the literature and the notion of security in Somalia by trying to puzzle out the link between state building and the security in Somalia. The article utilizes Mohammed Ayoob's concept of Third World security understanding, and argues that the history of state formation and the short experiences of the state building period in Somalia has shaped the internal security vulnerabilities and the social disintegration. The feeble experience of governance and state making process, have contributed significantly to the fragility and state failure, which in turn resulted in and led to -at the same time- the internal security susceptibilities and fragmentation of the society. The study also argues that the colonial legacy and the super power competition in Somalia have shaped the politics as well as its security environment.

Keywords: State making, Security, Colonial Legacy, Somalia

1. Introduction

Located in the horn of Africa, Somalia is the most homogenous country of the African continent ethnically, lingually and religiously. However, the country has been in a devastated civil war for about three decades, and all state institutions have almost collapsed. As a result, Somalia, lacked a functioning and effective government, and these conflicts left the country to be less secure and unstable for a long period. This article aims at contributing to bring a deep understanding to the security studies of the Horn of Africa to elucidate the security threats that Somalia has been facing since its independence in 1960. Exclusively, the paper explores the interaction of state formation, the colonial legacy and the super power's competition on the region, and how their impacts have led to the security vulnerabilities of Somalia. The paper employs Mohammed Ayoob's theory of Third World security understanding and argues that Somalia's security threats, mainly stem from the struggle of state building, and the foreign power's legacy to shape the politics and security environment of Somalia.

Although the Somali security issue is still unfolding, many scholars have already used much ink to analyze and enlighten the causes and consequences of the Somali civil war and more specifically the suffering of the Somali people following the state collapse. Most of these writings centered on either the implication of the war or the causes based on weak leadership or clan-based political culture. This paper acknowledges the merits of all of these arguments, but further argues that a very little attention has been paid to the role of the history of state building and foreign legacy on the instability and vulnerability of the Somalia security. With regard to Mohammed Ayoob's theory, the paper will mainly focus on security in relation to vulnerabilities that significantly threaten, or weaken state structures, both potential and institutional.¹ From that perspective the study attempts to describe the security vulnerabilities to

include the colonial legacy, the state making process in Somalia and the super power competition in the region of Horn of Africa.

The paper is structured into two main sections; first it gives an overall understanding about Mohammed Ayoob's understanding of Third world security, and second, it will discuss and analyze Somali security based on state making and the foreign power's legacy.

2. Mohammed Ayoob's Third World Security Understanding

Security, in traditional international relations literature, is based on two assumptions, which are 1) Security threats from outside of state's border; and 2) These threats are primarily military in nature, which will require a corresponding military response. According to Walter Lippmann:

*"A nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such a war."*²

According to this perspective, the security of a state is external or outwardly directed, to be safe from outside threats. "Citizens of developed Western states routinely take their security for granted until it is challenged by some extraordinary outside threats".³ However, Mohammed Ayoob argues, that the application of this concept of externally directed security to the Third World context, has created a major conceptual problem. This is so because the major characteristics of the security concept as developed in the Western literature on international relations are at least thoroughly diluted in the Third World. The first fundamental attribute of the traditional understanding of security is external directedness; however, "the sense of insecurity of the Third World, emanates to a substantial degree, from within their boundaries

rather than from outside”.⁴ The Third world states suffer primarily from internal threats to the security of their state structures and to the regimes themselves.

Since the application of these traditional understandings of international relations security to the Third World context is not enough to understand the scene, Ayooob, argues that the security of these states needs to be looked at from a different perspective. To explain this, Ayooob suggested a number of factors that inherit and contribute to the insecurity of the Third World states.⁵

First: State making and the security of the third world. According to Ayooob, it is unlikely to compare the Third World states to the developed ones, especially in the crucial variable of state making, where the commonality of both is simply having a formal possession of juridical statehood. However, the Third World states have not had adequate time to complete the prerequisite processes of state making and nation building, compared to the ideal type of the modern industrialized states. This drastic shortening of the time frame combined with the initially low level of state power, provide the primary explanation for the sharp internal challenges and the security vulnerabilities that the Third World states are facing today.⁶

Second: colonial legacy and its impact on the third world politics and security. In addition to the internal security vulnerabilities, the world powers have an impact - whether military, political or economic - on the state formation process and the security problematic of the Third World states. For instance, the colonial experience of the most Third World states, have had a predominant influence in shaping their politics and their security environments. One of these security problems created by the colonial experience, for example, is the decisions taken by the colonial powers to divide the ethnic groups into more than one state,

which have been responsible for creating many postcolonial interstate conflicts and many other problems. Somali people are one of the affected victims in this case.

Third: transfer of modern of weapons to the third world. For Ayoob, Sophisticated weapons acquired from developed world to provide security can often, increase prospects of conflict and, therefore, add to the insecurity of Third World states. These weapons from the industrialized countries to the Third World states had exacerbated the intensity and duration of regional and national conflict in Third World states. As a result of the combination of various factors (including, the superpowers' strategy to use arms transfers as political instruments to buy the loyalties of Third World leaders, the leading arms exporters' interest in using arms sales as a major booster for their economies), the Third World's dependence upon arms and military equipment imports from the developed countries has become “the defining characteristic of post-colonial North-South military relations”.⁷

3. Somalia security understanding

Similar to other Third World states, Somalia's security threats are mainly caused by its internal environment, and unlike the western concept of externally or outward directed security, these internal security vulnerabilities have led to the fragility and state failure of Somalia, and generally to the regional conflict in the Horn of Africa. While the external security threats incessantly persist, Somalia's internal vulnerabilities shape mainly its security and political environment. The fundamental factors that had destructive repercussions and caused insecurity and political instability are the history of state building process, the of colonial legacy and Cold War policies.

3.1 State making and Somali security

Somalia embodies, according to Seth Kaplan, one of the postcolonial Africa's worst mismatches between conventional state structures and the indigenous customs and institutions. While the Somalis share a common ethnicity, culture, language, and religion, which might seem to be an excellent basis for a cohesive state, yet in reality the Somali people are divided by clan affiliations, which is the most important component of their identity.⁸ While this has significant influences to the extent of Somalia's statehood, nevertheless the process and the history of statehood have far more weight to the capacity of the country to handle its internal security pressures, Somalia's state building, like most other Third World countries, has characterized a drastic shortening of the time frame of the various phases during the state making process. The country has experienced merely three decades of governance and statehood, with two of the three, had experienced authoritarian system of governance, political violence and instability.

Somalia's modern statehood started with the country's independence in 1960 and throughout the period from 1960-69 after independence, Somalia was touted in the West as the model of a democracy in Africa, as successful elections had been held in the country,⁹ and the anchors of the governmental institutions of Somalia had been set up. However, in 1969, a military coup overthrew the civilian government, banned all political parties, dissolved the parliament and the Supreme Court, suspended the constitution and advocated the scientific socialism of Marxist China and the Soviet Union.¹⁰

Following 21 years of military rule and dictatorship, Siyaad Barre's regime was eventually forced from power in the early 1991 by armed opposition groups. Hence, the country disintegrated into autonomous or semi-autonomous regional states in the northern part of

the country, or fragmented into feuding militia groups in the south. During this period, Somalia experienced violent conflict and instability in which almost all state institutions have either been damaged or destroyed. Many attempts to restore stability and rebuild the state institutions were made, in which weak transitional governments¹¹ and then federal government¹² were established as a result of top-down approaches. During this period these governments were faced by armed resistance groups, and yet the country is subject to violence and insecurity.

According to Ayoob, building effective and strong institutions, as well as good infrastructural power of states, require a long enough period of challenges, transformation and growth, that are similar to modern western states which had already undergone through a long and painful process. Somalia, however, lacks that accumulated experience of governance and leadership in its journey of state building process. For instance, as soon as the independence came, new elite started to govern the freshly independent state, comprised of all its inherited institutions, by mimicking structures and forms of the previous era of the colony. These new elite accessed the power to promote their interests and engaged with clannism.¹³ The subsequent authoritarian regime was characterized as a low level of institutionalization of political processes, concentration of power in the hands of the ruler, and private appropriation of state resources through corruption.¹⁴

Likewise, the opposition parties, which are important institutions to guide the government, were almost very weak in the civil rule era in 1960-1969, and lacked the competence to influence the country's politics and government's actions towards a positive trend. Following the military coup in October 1969, all political parties were dissolved and banned any political activities parallel to the revolution. Hence, the opponents fled outside the country and established armed militias based in Ethiopia. These armed rebels based on clan affiliation, thereby limited their appeal

to run a central government.¹⁵ Thus, the infirm and ineffective institutions have resulted to arise security vulnerabilities, and led to the collapse of the Somali state.

To sum up, the security predicament of Somalia is conditioned by the lateness with which the country has arrived at the state-making process. This short period of state making convulsed the security vulnerability, and therefore shaped the internal conflicts of the country.

3.2 Colonial Legacy and Somalia Security

The Geostrategic importance of Somalia, which is directly at the southern end of the Red Sea, across the Arabian Peninsula, and thus located close to major oil-lines, placed Somalia to a foreign struggle for a long period of time.¹⁶

The scramble for Africa in the last quarter of nineteenth century, Somali people were divided between different colonies with dissimilar systems, managed to create the rudimentary structures of colonial administration, with different schemes of colonialism before and after WWII. This different colonial rule lasted until 1960.¹⁷

One of the negative results that have shaped Somalia's security till today is the decisions made by the colonies to divide the ethnic Somalis into different territories, which have created a lasting regional tensions and disputes, like the wars in 1964 and in 1977 between Somalia and Ethiopia.

3.3 Cold War and Somalia Security

With the start of the Cold War, the global military rivalry between the U.S. and USSR led to a period of escalating tensions between the superpowers, and divert their conflict to the Third World as proxy

war.¹⁸ The superpowers were mainly concerned about their security by contesting each other outside their borders. Somalia, for its geopolitical importance, was one of the Third World grounds victimized to test the balance of power of NATO and WARSAW's competition on global power politics. The influence of these international forces, as either military, or political made a substantial difference to the fortunes of Somalia's state making enterprise and to the larger security problems of the state. Due to huge amounts of military hardware from the Soviet Union and US, Somalia "became the most militarized state per capita in the Horn of Africa".¹⁹ Consequently, the importance of this influence in the Cold War and the impact of the colonial powers' decisions to divide the Somali territories had caused the permanent tension between Somalia and Ethiopia, and full armed war at some times, in which the worst was in 1977.²⁰

As a result of the colonial experience, and the cold war, external factors had predominantly influenced in shaping the Somali politics and its security environment. This had major consequences on the internal security of the country, with one flash point, the war of 1977 against Ethiopia disregarded Somalia's potential internal insecurity vulnerabilities. Certainly, those huge amounts of military hardware from Somalia's former sponsors during the Cold War created a regional tension and ensured a long-term destabilization of the country.²¹

Generally, because of these super power competitions in the region, the Cold War had a negative impact on the Somalia security environment, as the country considered its external security as more momentous than its internal security vulnerabilities.

3.4 Global Counterterrorism and Somali Security

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and emerging of the New World Order, the United States considered Somalia as no longer significant for its foreign policy strategy as the Soviet Union' threat ended. The attempt to save Somalia in 1993 with the UN's authorized mission didn't succeed and ended with unhappy withdrawal in early 1995.

After 9/11, Somalia appeared on the scene, and attracted the eyes of the world in a security measure under the global war against so-called terrorism.²² Somalia, thus, became an arena for a global war, which, in turn, shaped the internal agenda in political and security dimensions. In this regard, Somalia has witnessed some efforts with gradually intensifying operations. And some "ill-conceived foreign interventions" worsened the situation. In 2005, the signs of confrontation became clear in Mogadishu streets, and at the beginning of 2006, the confrontation was polarized into two groups: ICU and ARPCT. Mogadishu based factional leaders declared "The Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism (ARPCT)" on February 2006 and declared a war allegedly supported by the US, against Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a group of Islamic courts that united themselves to form a rival administration to the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia.²³ This war became a prolonged war and still is continuing.

Another time, security concern became the propelling force of the West's interest in Somalia.

Global Counterterrorism war became the preceded agenda and dominated the operations and the projects sponsored by the international community in Somalia. However, the security predicament is merely a part, not the whole of Somalia's problem. In

addition, the security problem in Somalia has resulted from the state building failure, and therefore, re-building the state institutions, social re-integration and resolving the grievances resulted from the civil war with a true reconciliation, would have been the biggest challenge for Somalia's state building and security environment.

Generally, starting from the colonial legacy, the Cold war and the global war on terror, Somalia has undergone various influences of the international forces which have shaped its internal and external security environment fallaciously.

4. Conclusion

This article discussed the security threats that Somalia has faced in the post-independence era, and attempted to give a comprehensive understanding on the effect of colonial legacy and super power competition on state building and the security vulnerabilities, as well as state collapse in Somalia. The study argues that Somalia's security threats mainly stem from its internal environment, which can be referred to the inadequate experience and the maturity of state building and governance to overcome and resolve the internal security vulnerabilities and respond to people's needs.

The study also showed that the colonial legacy and foreign power's rivalry in Somalia, has immensely shaped and influenced the security environment of Somalia, and this has been real on the ground since the Cold War and until this era.

Notes and References

- ¹ Ayoob, M. (1991) The Security problematic of the third world, *World Politics* 43, 257-83
- ² Lippmann, W. (1943) *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* Boston: Little Brown, 51.
- ³ J. Jackson-Preece (2011), *Security in international relations*, University of London, P.14
- ⁴ Ayoob, M. (1991) The Security problematic of the third world, *World Politics* 43, 263
- ⁵ Ayoob, M. (1991) The Security problematic of the third world, *World Politics* 43, 257-83
- ⁶ Keith Krause (1998). Theorizing security, state formation and the 'Third World' in the post-Cold War world. *Review of International Studies*, 24, pp 125-136.
- ⁷ Ayoob, M. (1991) The Security problematic of the third world, *World Politics* 275, 257-83
- ⁸ Kaplan, S. (2010) Rethinking state building in a failed state. *Center for Strategic and International Studies. The Washington Quarterly*, 33:1 pp. 81-97.
- ⁹ Ewusi, K., & Akwanga, E. (2010). *Burundi's Negative Peace: The Shadow of a Broken Continent in the Era of Nepad*. Canada. P.81.
- ¹⁰ Ismail, A. A. (2010). *Somali State Failure: Players, Incentives and Institutions*. Helsinki: Helsinki School of Economics. P.85
- ¹¹ After about nine years of absence of central government, Somalia witnessed twelve years of transitional governments (2000-2012), when the transitional government is established in Djibouti in 2000, and headed by Abdiqasim Salad Hassan in 2000–2004, then Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed in 2004–2008, and then Sharif Sheikh Ahmed from 2009 to 2012.
- ¹² The Federal Government of Somalia was established on August 2012, following the end of the transitional governments' era (2000-2012).
- ¹³ Michele Gonnelli (2013). *Clan and State Politics in Somalia*. Somalia: Clan and state politics. The ITPCM International Commentary, Vol IX, no.34. December 2013, p. 8

- ¹⁴ Daniel C. (1992) Political Decay in Somalia: From Personal Rule to Warlordism”, *Refuge*, Vol. 12, No. 5.
- ¹⁵ Daniel C. (1992) Political Decay in Somalia: From Personal Rule to Warlordism”, *Refuge*, Vol. 12, No. 5.
- ¹⁶ Philipp Schulz (2011) “The Horn of Africa in a Bipolar World: The Cold War as the Origin of the Somalia Crisis”, *URJHS Volume 10*. Retrieved from <http://www.kon.org/urc/v10/schulz.html> on 07.07.2015.
- ¹⁷ Maxamed Ibraahim Liqliiqato (2000) “Taariikhda Soomaaliya: Dalkii Filka Weynaa ee Punt [Somali History]”, *Muqdisho, Soomaaliya*, 60-135.
- ¹⁸ Lee Wengraf (2011) “Making Somalia's nightmare worse: ‘Operation Restore Hope’ 1992-1994,” *International Socialist review*, Issue #77, May 2011. Retrieved from <http://isreview.org/issue/77/making-somalias-nightmare-worse> on 07.07.2015
- ¹⁹ Philipp Schulz (2011) “The Horn of Africa in a Bipolar World: The Cold War as the Origin of the Somalia Crisis”, *URJHS Volume 10*. Retrieved from <http://www.kon.org/urc/v10/schulz.html> on 07.07.2015.
- ²⁰ Lee Wengraf (2011) “Making Somalia's nightmare worse: ‘Operation Restore Hope’ 1992-1994,” *International Socialist review*, Issue #77, May 2011. Retrieved from <http://isreview.org/issue/77/making-somalias-nightmare-worse> on 07.07.2015
- ²¹ Philipp Schulz (2011) “The Horn of Africa in a Bipolar World: The Cold War as the Origin of the Somalia Crisis”, *URJHS Volume 10*. Retrieved from <http://www.kon.org/urc/v10/schulz.html> on 07.07.2015.
- ²² More details see: International Crisis Group (2002, May) “Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State”, *Africa Report No 45*, Nairobi/Brussels, 23 May 2002.
- ²³ For more details, see International Crisis Group (2005) “Counter-Terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds?” *Africa Report No 95*, Nairobi/Brussels, 11 July 2005. And “can the Somali crisis be contained?” *Africa Report No 116*, 10 August 2006.