State collapse and post-conflict development in Africa : the case of Somalia (1960-2001)
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Preface and Acknowledgements

I started this research project in 1994 after the Somali state collapsed and the intervention of the international community was already in full gear in the country. During this period I often read and heard two explanations for the disintegration of the state, which were frequently reiterated in the writings emanating from conventional academic circles, journalists and occasional observers and broadcasted by the media. Firstly, the collapse of the state is presented as an event which happened suddenly, as no historical explanation is proffered. Secondly, primordial and violent clan politics are suggested to be the cause for the implosion of the state in Somalia. I found both explanations not only extremely shallow but also ahistorical, static and idiosyncratic in nature. This dissatisfaction therefore is what motivated me to embark on writing this dissertation. Rather, I am of the opinion that the collapse of the Somali state must not be considered as a sudden event but as cumulative and incremental process over a long period of time. It is thus very important to search out the causes of the present in the past. Only in this way can we comprehend and delineate the significant forces that have been at work in the destruction of Somalia.

The purpose of the study is to probe below the simplistic headlines and examine the political economy of the collapsed state through a historically informed inquiry. Phrased in another way, the study discusses the collapse of the state within the dynamics of its own concrete historical reality and specific formation. In this respect, the study explores to what extent the constraints in the material environment and the misfortunes in the Somali history through time have contributed to the disintegration of the state. I will also consider, however, in brief the initiatives undertaken to restore a stable political order in Somalia and the obstacles, which are making it intractable. Since 1991, after the state collapsed, a post-conflict political development has been in process in Somalia. This ongoing political process merits a careful monitoring and, more importantly, further academic research. In short, this study is a modest contribution to the knowledge in the field of Somali studies and to the ongoing debates, which focus on the nature, construction, collapse and reconstitution of the contemporary states in Africa.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the US, Somalia has once again captured the attention of the world media. This time Somalia was presented to the world not as a wretched place on earth, as was the case ten years ago but as an active collaborator to an international crime. Somalia was alleged to have camps run by al Qaeda militants who trained internationally operating terrorists. As a result, Somalia is now one of the top-listed countries that harbour terrorist groups and America is contemplating an attack on the country. This new development demonstrates how the absence of state authority and law and order and the enduring political anarchy in Somalia remain a threat not only to the Somalis living in the country but also can pose a threat to peace and security internationally.

Over the past ten years, power and authority have been the most highly contested issues in Somalia. Consequently, the political power in the country now is profoundly fragmented to nodes and myriads of rival powers organised along lines determined by locality, clans, militia factions, warlords, and religion. Each of these power groups is locked in a fight against the rest and also attempts to marshal external military and financial support to win the domestic war. It is in this way that the Somali protagonists in the country have been trying to
regionalise and also internationalise their internal power struggles. And they have been getting assistance in one form or another from the neighbouring countries, Islamist groups and Somalis in the Diaspora. In this respect, the ongoing political conflict in Somalia is a good example of how a local conflict raging in a remote corner in the world can still entangle itself in wider regional and international power struggles.

The global political development after the September 11 attacks makes the conflict and post-conflict analysis in Somalia that I have discussed in the book significant in two respects. Firstly, it is becoming very urgent now more than ever to thoroughly analyse and understand the root causes and dynamics of intra-state, interstate and regional conflicts wherever they take place. This is imperative if we want to prevent localised conflicts from escalating further and contain them in the zones where they have originated. Secondly, if certain localised and domestic conflicts are ignored or not dealt with constructively but allowed to drag on as in Somalia or Afghanistan, they are likely to have dangerous global ramifications. For instance, once again the domestic conflict in Somalia is becoming internationalised. In 1992, the international community led by the United States intervened in Somalia to restore order and stabilise the violent conflict raging in the country but that mission was withdrawn after a short while. Now after Afghanistan, America is planning to surgically bomb the suspected terrorist sites in Somalia. However, this kind of ad-hoc muscle flex is not a sensible strategy and will not succeed in subduing chronic conflicts like this in Somalia. In fact, conflicts like this in Somalia require a constant and long-time engagement in order to be managed and stabilised rather than ad-hoc interventions, a jolt of military muscle and prompt exit.

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