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

Public Pursuit and Militarisation of the State (1960-1980)

6.1. Introduction

"Somalia has been a victim of both the Cold War and the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War the strategic value of Somalis to the superpowers was inflated. As a result the two superpowers poured armaments into that little country. When the Cold War ended, the strategic value of Somalia plunged like stock market prices on Wall Street at the start of the Great Depression. At one time it was a poor arid country but with a strategic location. In the global scheme of things, the two mighty capitals of the world --- Washington and Moscow --- were competing to make sure the country was in the "right" hands. Then suddenly the Cold War ended and that value plunged like a mighty dollar no longer mighty. Both the rise in inflated strategic value which took the form of arming it to the limit and the fall as a result of the Cold War were devastating for Somalia. No one cared enough to help prevent its disintegration" From Ali Mazrui, Crisis in Somalia: From Tyranny to Anarchy (1997).

In chapter four I discussed how the partitioning of Somalia among rival colonial powers had been the most dramatic foreign aggression that the Somali people had ever endured. Since then, the Somalis have been struggling to regain their lost territories by all means in their power. And this struggle to bring together the ethnic Somalis under one political entity has been the prime concern of the politics of public pursuit waged by the political elite. This chapter extends the discussion in chapter four and examines how the politics of public pursuit launched through an irredentist adventure militarised the state during the Cold War era.

At independence in 1960 only two of the five parts of the ethnic Somali inhabited territories merged and became the new Republic of Somalia. The two parts were British Somaliland and Italian Somalia. However, three areas which the Somali nationals inhabit were still missing and remained under foreign domination. The parts that remained under foreign occupation were the eastern regions of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. In 1977, Djibouti achieved its independence from France under a Somali President who declined to merge it with the Republic of Somalia.

As I already discussed at length in chapter four, this problem of territorial dismemberment was a terrible legacy Somalis inherited from colonialism.\(^{145}\) In the closing decades of the 19th century, during the scramble for Africa, the competing imperial powers had parcelled the country into five parts. Compared with the other colonised countries in Africa, the partition of Somalia into five different colonial frontiers was indeed an exception.\(^{146}\) No other country in

\(^{145}\) Despite the existence of specified clan-inhabited geographical zones in the country, nevertheless the parcelling of the land was terrible in the minds of many Somalis since according to their world outlook the territorial integrity of Somalia exists as a social (i.e. ethnical) and emotional construct.

\(^{146}\) According to Khapoya, "the Somalis are probably unique among African people in having been colonized by three different European powers and in having found themselves living in four different countries (Khapoya
Africa has been so radically fragmented into five colonial zones like Somalia. The parcelling of the country not only squeezed the grazing land of the Somali pastoral nomads but also divided family members into demarcated colonial frontiers. In fact, this was one of the most dramatic experiences that the Somalis had to confront due to the colonial partitioning of their homeland.

Immediately after independence this problem of the missing territories and how they could be regained had become the overriding political agenda of the new Republic of Somalia. Most of the Somali public were in support of the struggle in regaining the missing territories. The issue also gained a prominent position in the decision-making policy of the political class in the country early on, from the moment the Republic was established until the late 1970s. It became the salient political agenda, which dominated the foreign relations of Somalia. Furthermore, it was the sole national project that the Somali governments were prepared to pursue at all costs to the extent of neglecting the urging domestic social concerns and economic development. As a result, within a few years after the country achieved statehood it was the pursuit of this Pan-Somali unity, which led Somalia to become embroiled in border clashes with Ethiopia and Kenya that presented a potential threat to the stability of the region.

After de-colonisation, Somalia was the only country in sub-Saharan Africa, which fiercely disputed and rejected the status quo of the boundaries established by the departed imperial powers. However, this blatant rejection was resented by the neighbouring countries, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which accepted the inviolability of the inherited colonial frontiers, as well as the ex-imperial Western powers of Somalia. Yet the Somali political elite in defiance insisted that the colonial borders were artificial, unlawful and arbitrarily created, and this would not hinder them from championing the right to self-determination of their Somali nationals under foreign subjugation. Article 6 (4) of the constitution of the Somali Republic firmly states that: “the Somali Republic shall promote, by legal and peaceful means, the union of Somali territories”. This political aspiration of the new Republic which was diametrically in contrast to the position taken by the OAU, calling for respect for the territorial inviolability of member states, had caused Somalia a great deal of foreign relations problems.

For instance, the territorial claims of the Somali Republic were viewed by most African leaders as a very dangerous expansionist adventure, and that brought Somalia into diplomatic isolation in the continent. The quest also put the diplomatic relations between Somalia and


147 “Since independence, and the unification of British Somaliland and the Italian Somali trusteeship in 1960 to form the current state boundaries, Somali leaders have vowed to unite all Somalis. Defense and the issue of ‘absent’ Somali territories have always received priority in the central government budget and have dominated parliamentary debates and international diplomacy efforts” (Mubarak 1996:38).

148 For example, in 1964 AHG/Res 16(1) was adopted by the Cairo OAU Summit which stated: that all member states pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of independence”. For further information, see the Basic Documents of the Organization of African Unity (Addis Ababa, May 1963).

149 As Marte notes, “given the fact that most independent African countries inherited the colonial borders that were set by the former colonial powers, they were reluctant to support Somalia’s irredentist ambitions and territorial claims, as they feared that this could backfire and encourage minorities in their own countries to seek reunification with their brethren on the other side of the ‘colonial’ border” (Marte 1994:222).
the West in jeopardy particularly those with Britain, which was one of the chief financial patrons of the country at the time. Because of the diplomatic row Britain cut its financial aid to Somalia. This then deprived the new country (whose meagre natural endowment offered few alternatives to animal husbandry and abject camel economy), the financial support needed most for its economic development. Yet, oblivious of or perhaps uninterested with the pitfalls of these grave foreign relations problems the country was confronted with, the Somali political elite embarked early on their Pan-Somalı politics with an uncompromising irredentist campaign.\textsuperscript{150} To retreat again, a strong irredentist drive has been the marked feature, which defined the Somali Republic after independence. It was also the military preparation of this irredentist adventure that militarised the state early on. The Somali political elite justified their aggressive foreign policy as being the right strategy in the process of building a single Somali state.\textsuperscript{151} According to their point of view, the Somali nation was fragmented beyond the Republic and without the unification of a whole nation, the Somali national identity was deemed incomplete.\textsuperscript{152} Consequently, the politics of the Pan-Somalı struggles was implicitly pursued by the political elite as a strategy of rule or a legitimisation of their power, as well as a mechanism for internal social cohesion and stability.\textsuperscript{153} The political elite knew very well that the only sentiment, which can galvanise the lineage segmented Somali population, is the appeal for redemption of the missing Somali inhabited lands. Beyond this objective, there is little nationalist fervour to unite the population and for which Somalis are willing to be mobilised. The appeal of the Pan-Somalı aspiration was that it was an emotional sentiment constructed on a cultural identity but poorly grounded in rational political calculations (Lewis 1989). More important, the ordinary Somalis were urging the leadership to struggle by any means for the unification of all the territories inhabited by the ethnic Somali population. Thus, in this respect, the general Somali public was of the opinion that unification struggle should be a very serious national preoccupation which every Somali leader must continue to advocate and fiercely campaign for.

\textsuperscript{150} According to Bell, “from the beginning, Somalia pursued an irredentist policy. Even after the OAU refused to support its claim, and without significant allies or an effective army, Mogadishu was determined on the adventure. This was at the time when even the slow pace of development came to a halt” (Bell 1973:23).

\textsuperscript{151} As has been suggested, “since independence virtually all of Somalia’s foreign policy has centered around a single fact: that the entire Somali nation is not ruled by a single Somali state. This fact constitutes the Somali dilemma: Somalia remains a nation in search of a state” (David Laitin and Said Samatar 1987:129).

\textsuperscript{152} This is the puzzle, which baffles outsiders. In Somalia, clan and national identity compete. Internally, Somalis accent clan identity while externally they prefer to project their collective national identity. In fact, for the Somalis, clan and national identity is two sides of a coin as they use them interchangeably according to the circumstance. A Somali when he is in front of another Somali will not hesitate to mention his clan name but in front of stranger he will say that he is a Somali.

\textsuperscript{153} According to Sinclair, “internal harmony was further encouraged, at the price of external conflict, by the strong commitment of all political leaders to the nationalist struggle which aimed at extending the boundaries of the new state to include the missing Somali communities in Ethiopia, French Somaliland and Northern Kenya” (Sinclair 1980: 11). For more information, see M.R. Sinclair, The Strategic Significance of the Horn of Africa (Pretoria: Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, 1980).
6.2. The Somali Republic and the Cold War

The birth of the Somali Republic in the 1960s coincided with the highest peak of Cold War geopolitics between the two superpowers. Therefore, the imperatives of the Cold War made the newly emerged Republic of Somalia a pawn of the superpower politics. Thus, as Hashim notes,

“The Cold War coming on the heels of the era of colonialism deprived Somalia, as it did many African nations, of the time required to regain an independent identity and prepare to meet the challenges of the twentieth century. Throughout her history Somalia has been a pawn in the schemes of more powerful states and coalitions of states” (Hashim 1995:219).

Somalia also became a theatre of superpower rivalry for strategic position. This means that the conflicts between Somalia and its neighbouring countries in the region, such as Ethiopia were meddled in constantly by the superpowers. And they meddled chiefly to serve and further their respective strategic interests.

In the aftermath of the Second World War II, global power struggles between the United States and the Soviet Union had emerged. Since the beginning of this Cold War rivalry till its end, the states in the Horn received the brunt of the superpowers’ confrontations. Ethiopia and Somalia particularly, because of their long standing conflicts were the places in which the superpowers fought by proxy. This is how Legum and Lee expressed the vulnerable position of the Third World states during the Cold War era:

“the political opportunities open to the major powers to pursue their interests in the Third World are mostly provided by the needs of smaller nations who are engaged less in ideological struggle than in pursuing their own conceived national interests. In their concern to strengthen their own position weak states often turn to a major power for assistance where their interests coincide - the result can turn purely local conflicts into international involvement” (Legum and Lee 1977:5-6).

This is precisely what happened in the Horn region. The rivalling states of Ethiopia and Somalia sought external assistance and that facilitated the entry of the foreign powers. The global powers in order to retain or advance their geopolitical hold in the region extended generous support in terms of military, technical and financial assistance to their respective clients. Gradually, the magnitude of the superpowers’ involvement in the internal conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia had assumed a wider dimension and became “... an integral part of East-West rivalry for the political allegiance of the grey areas of the globe, i.e. the Third World (Ayoob 1980:136).

In the case of Somalia, both superpowers and their respective allies were willing to provide generous military assistance at one time or another. The involvement of the Western countries, particularly the United States in Somalia, began within a few years after the end of World War II and continued throughout the early 1960s. The US interest in Somalia was largely motivated by the containment of Russian and Chinese influence in the country. As Schraeder writes:
“US foreign policy towards the Horn of Africa between 1945 and 1990 was guided by a series of Cold War rationales that viewed the region as a means for solving non-African problems. Specifically, U.S. policymakers did not perceive the countries and peoples of the Horn of Africa as important in their own right but, rather, as a means of preventing the further advances of Soviet communism. As a result, US relations with various regimes in the region evolved according to their perceived importance within an East-West framework” (Schraeder 1992:571).

To make sure that Somalia should not fall into the Soviet Union camp, the Western countries were willing to present themselves as credible patrons and assist the new government. However, as I shall indicate below, the leadership of the Somali Republic knew that America and other Western countries were providing substantially more military assistance both to Ethiopia and Kenya (their principal adversaries) than what was offered to them. Furthermore, the new leadership of the Republic had an urgent mission. They wanted to build up the military capability of the country as speedily as possible in order to overcome the military weakness of Somalia relative to Ethiopia, its chief rival in the region. However, this military build up priority on the part of the Somali government was not what the Americans and its Western allies were willing to sponsor. Eventually, the urgency for this military project drove Somalia to the side of the Soviet Union and its Eastern allies, who were willing to help the leadership of Somalia build up a powerful army for an irredentist war.

The nature of the conflict in the Horn of Africa and the Cold War politics in the sub-region has been the subject of an academic debate. While some authors suggest a regionalist view others stress a globalist perspective. The regionalist thesis maintains that the conflict in the Horn of Africa, which is largely internal and perpetuated by historic tensions among nationalities, ethnic groups, religious differences and political dynamics, is what often invited the foreign powers to meddle in the affairs of the sub-region. The notable scholars of this tradition are Bereket Habte Sellassie and Marina Ottaway. By contrast, the globalist proponents contend that the prevailing conflict in the Horn of Africa is largely external and is wrought by the strategic location of the sub-region. According to this school, it is the geography and the geopolitical positioning of the countries in the Horn that attracts the foreign powers to involve in their domestic conflict. It is therefore this strategic significance, which makes the conflict in the Horn assume a global dimension. The scholars who subscribe to this globalist perspective include M.R. Sinclair and J. Bowyer Bell among others.

It is obvious that both debates present critical aspects of internal tensions and external geopolitical dynamics, which indeed reinforce and perpetuate the conflict in the Horn of Africa. However, the geographical location is the critical factor that attracted in varying degrees of superpower involvement in the Horn of Africa (see for example, Farer 1979;

154 Ayoob concurs with Schraeder and notes that: “American involvement in the Horn was, however, related not so much to its interest in Africa, as to its general Cold War policy of ‘containment’ or pre-emption of the Soviet Union and, more specifically, to its support for Israel in the Middle East” (Ayoob 1980:164). This was because of the strategic importance to Israel of the Straits of Bal-al-Mandeb, the narrow waterway between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. See further, Mordechai Abir, “Red Sea Politics’, Conflicts in Africa, Adelphi Papers, no.93 (December 1972): 25-37.

155 For more discussion, see Bereket Habte Selassie, Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980); and Marina Ottaway, Soviet and American influence in the Horn of Africa (New York: Praeger, 1982).

156 For more information, see Sinclair (1980) and J. Bowyer Bell, The Horn of Africa: Strategic Magnet of the Seventies (New York: Crane Russak, 1973).
Therefore, in this study, I concur with the globalist proponents that the involvement of the superpowers in the Horn of Africa during the Cold War era is largely determined by geography and the strategic significance of the sub-region. After the Cold War ended, the strategic value of the countries in the Horn like Somalia thus plummeted. Since then there have been grave internal wars and conflicts in most of the countries in the Horn of Africa and yet no foreign power has shown an interest in meddling in it. For instance, in 1991 when the civil war broke out in the country, Somalia was left to fend for itself. This is one of the concrete examples that can be cited. In short, the external geopolitical interest in the region during the Cold War had been the overriding factor, which gave the internal conflicts a global dimension and swept the countries in the Horn into the turmoil of global politics.

6.3. The Civilian Government and the War of 1964

At the end of 1963 when the Somali Republic was only three years old, a border war between Ethiopia and Somalia broke out. There was agitation and a guerrilla uprising among the Somalis living in eastern region of Ethiopia in June 1963 after Haile Selassi rejected their demand for self-government in the Ogaden. The disturbance escalated further and when the Ethiopian army attempted to put an end to it with a heavy hand, the Somali government felt obliged to come to the aid of its Somali kinsmen under foreign siege. Thereafter, a military confrontation between the two armed forces of Ethiopia and Somalia took place. However, although the fighting was brief it nevertheless exposed the military weakness of Somalia. During the war, the Ethiopian army, estimated at around thirty thousand troops, easily overran the Somali army, which was estimated at about four thousand fighting men. Furthermore, the Ethiopian warplanes demonstrating their superior powers, bombarded locations at the heart of the country without any risk. The defenceless situation of the new Somali Republic at the time in relation to Ethiopia and Kenya was due to the small size of its armed forces. It urged the country to embark on building a large and strong army and to procure massive military armaments. For instance, while the total army of Somalia, including military, police and other security forces such as intelligence units and secret services was only 9,400, the total armed strength of Ethiopia and Kenya was 79,000 as shown in Table 1. The border war also forced the civilian government of the Republic to allocate a relatively high proportion of the budget to military purposes at the expense of economic and social development in the country.

157 According to Farer, “geography is the force which has evoked varying degrees of superpower concern with the Horn. Under the terms of a mutual defense agreement signed in 1953, the United States supplied Ethiopia with over $200 million worth of military assistance, virtually one-half of all U.S. military aid to sub-Saharan Africa during the next two decades” (Farer 1979:2). For more discussion, see Tom Farer, War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979).

158 During the same period, the Somali government was also supporting clandestine guerrilla activity waged by ethnic Somalis living in northern Kenya, which lasted from 1963 to 1967.
Table 1

The state of the armed forces of Ethiopia, Kenya and the Somali Republic in 1965

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ethiopia</th>
<th>Kenya</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25,000 to 35,000</td>
<td>United States, Sweden, Norway, India, Israel, United Kingdom</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>Italy, Soviet Union, United Arab Republic, United Kingdom</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1963 the government of Somalia refused a modest offer amounting to ten million dollars in military assistance from three Western countries - USA, West Germany and Italy. The three Western countries were willing to provide this military aid to the government of Somalia in order to train an army of six thousand men which would be deployed for internal security tasks and civic action within the country. The government flatly rejected this limited military aid from the West because it was considered too little. And as Marte rightly points out:

“But Somalia, given its irredentist agenda, was interested in more than the Western countries were ready to bargain for. Mogadishu wanted an army, and a large one, to back up its territorial claims against the neighbouring states in question” (Marte 1994:220).

During this same year, the foreign relations between Somalia and the British government dramatically worsened. The Somali government was outraged when the British government unilaterally decided to let Kenya annex the Northern Frontier District inhabited largely by Somali nationals. This then led the Somali government to break off diplomatic relations with Britain, a decision, which put to a sudden end to the budgetary aid from Britain that the country urgently needed at the time. For example, the country automatically lost substantial development aid of about £1.3 million per year from Britain, which had already been negotiated (Laitin and Samatar 1987:138). However, what worried the Somali government at the time was not the immense task of developing the extremely poor economy of the country. This issue took a secondary place to the project of the heavy investment in the military and the preparation for an irredentist war that the Somali government was deeply preoccupied with in order to unite all the ethnic Somalis in one country. ¹⁵⁹

Pursuing its heavy armament policy the Somali government once again made a request to the United States for huge military assistance to build up a force of twenty thousand standing ¹⁵⁹ For example, “in 1964 the average military expenditure as a percentage of GNP in Africa was 2.4; in Somalia it was 3.4. In a country with a per capita GNP of about $150, heavy military expenditures was especially hard to bear. Worse still, many avenues for economic cooperation between Somalia and its neighbours were closed off. Somalis were paying a high cost to uphold the principle of self-determination for Somalis in neighbouring countries” (Laitin and Said Samatar 1987:138-139).
troops viewed as sufficient to safeguard the sovereignty of the Republic. At the time, the Somali government was afraid of the possibility of coordinated invasions from Ethiopia and Kenya, which by then had signed a defence pact.\footnote{\textit{In late 1964 Kenya’s President Jomo Kenyatta and Ethiopia’s Emperor Haile Selassie signed a mutual defense agreement aimed against Somali aggression} (Nelson 1982:233).} However, the United States was reluctant to sponsor the Somali desire for the establishment of a large national army and particularly for an army which would be trained for an irredentist war against its regional allies of Ethiopia and Kenya. This disappointment therefore forced the Somali government to accept a large amount of Soviet military aid estimated to be around thirty-two million dollars, which was intended to build up an army of ten thousand men and develop an air force (Africa Report, January 1964). And as expected, the decision to accept an arms offer from the Soviets opened the door for the involvement of the Soviet Union and its Eastern allies in the Somali Republic. The Soviet courtship of Somalia that had already begun was solidified when a delegation from the government in Moscow visited the country in April 1961. In contrast to the United States, the Soviet Union was not only willing to sponsor the military project of the Somali government but was also ready for an open-ended arms commitment to Somalia over a long period.\footnote{According to Ottaway, “the decision to pursue a policy of military build-up had clearly been taken by the Somali government on its own and was not the result of outside influences. However, the Soviet Union did have a strong impact on the course of events at this time by making it possible for the Mogadishu government to implement the policy it had chosen. Somalia could not have built a large army on its own, or obtained help for such a purpose from other countries. In this respect the Soviet impact on the militarisation of Somalia was very important” (Ottaway 1982:39).}

For example, the Soviet Union helped the Somali government to expand its army force from a dismal number of four thousand men that was very small by absolute standards to twelve thousand well-equipped men from 1960 to 1970.\footnote{The twelve thousand Somali troops consisted of ten thousand in the army, seventeen hundred and fifty in the air force, and two hundred and fifty in the navy. Furthermore, there were more than six thousand five hundred men in the police force and paramilitary corps such as the border guards (Darawishta) and the People’s Militia (Victory Pointers).} During that decade, a large number of Soviet military advisers arrived in Somalia in order to train the Somali army, while at the same time, a large number of high school Somali graduates went to the Soviet Union for military training. In 1969, it was suggested that more than eight hundred Somali military personnel in the national army were trained in the Soviet Union (Adam 1998:372). By the end of the decade, the heavy build-up of the military made the Somali army force the fourth largest in sub-Saharan Africa, after Nigeria, Ethiopia and Ghana, whose respective populations were much larger than that of Somalia. This means that the size of the Somali army was very large relative to the population in the country. As with respect to defence spending, Somalia ranked as number one in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of the percentage of the GNP that the country allocated to the military. For instance, in 1961 the defence spending of the Somali government amounted to 14 per cent of the national budget, which increased to 25 per cent in 1970 (Adam 1998:375).

The Soviet Union also provided the Somali government with economic aid although this was far less than the considerable military aid that the country received. The financial aid Somalia received from the Soviet Union, which began in 1962 and ended in 1977 amounted to about US$154 million (Nelson 1982:221). This financial assistance nonetheless helped to guard the anaemic Somali economy from inflation and ensured a stable foreign exchange rate that kept the Somali shilling at 6.35 to one US dollar for most of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, despite this...
close patron-client relationship, until 1969 the political influence of the Soviet Union in Somalia was negligible. Ingeniously keeping a better balance between the two power blocs and adhering publicly neither to socialism nor capitalism at the time the Somali government was able to get massive aid from both.\(^{163}\) And this massive aid was what enabled the civilian government of Somalia to increase steadily its exorbitant defence expenditures as shown in Table 2. The aid also helped the government to expand the size of the army force about 500 per cent (Laitin and Said Samatar 1987:108).

Table 2

**Somalia: Defence Expenditure - Pre-Revolution**

(in millions of shillings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1967*</th>
<th>1968*</th>
<th>1969</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Budget</strong></td>
<td>272.1</td>
<td>281.6</td>
<td>301.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recurrence budget for defence, police and interior</strong></td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>106.6</td>
<td>117.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% Total</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Estimates

In 1967 the last Premier of the civilian government in the country decided to moderate the uncompromisingly irredentist politics of public pursuit, which Somalia had been waging since its independence in 1960. This aggressive foreign policy approach had consumed much of the meagre resources and the energy of the nation and it could no longer be sustained either materially or politically. Therefore, a decision had to be made which could temper the current foreign policy relations of Somalia. As a result, Premier Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal initiated a relaxed foreign policy and a policy of détente with Ethiopia, Kenya and the French in Djibouti. What Egal wanted was to shift the attention of the government from the irredentist politics of Pan-Somalí unity to the immense social and economic problems in the Republic.\(^{164}\) During that period, the impact of the Suez Canal closure in June 1967 had devastating consequences on the poor economy of the Somali Republic, which worsened further the economic situation in the country. For instance, the foreign-exchange earnings from bananas and livestock, the two largest national export products, plummeted by sixty percent in the first year after the closure of the Suez Canal (See for example, Bell 1973; Marte 1994; Payton 1980).

However, the normalisation of the foreign policy, which led to the temporary abandonment of the irredentist politics of Pan-Somalí pursuit and the peace treaty that Premier Egal signed

\(^{163}\) To demonstrate the political neutrality of the Somali government with respect to the ideological rivalry between the two power blocs in November 1963 the Prime Minister of the Republic, Shermarke, visited the United States where he was welcomed at the White House by President Kennedy.

\(^{164}\) This is how Mohamed Osman Omar described the situation in the country: “how could a government begin to think of liberating a territory when it could not provide food and proper medical treatment to the people it was already responsible for?” (Omar 1992:65).
with the neighbouring countries, was reacted to by most of the public with condemnation. After all, since independence, the political leadership of Somalia had pursued the irredentist politics as a strategy for domestic social cohesion and also fiercely propagated it as the most important national goal. It was in this context therefore that many ordinary Somalis viewed the friendly foreign policy of the government of Egal towards the neighbouring states to be a betrayal of the Pan-Somalı unity. All over the country, there was widespread discontent against the détente policy of Egal and in the capital demonstrations were organised. There were also protests among members in the parliament. Yet, “although this new policy initially aroused hostility at home, with the financial resources at his disposal the new Premier was soon able to secure a favourable balance of cautious support” (Lewis 1972:396).

But not every section of the society was willing to toe the line. The opponents whose view represented much of the political attitude of the public and also the military were harshly critical of the policy of détente. The military in particular that had been trained and armed for years for an irredentist war, in order to liberate all Somali-inhabited areas were badly disillusioned. Thus, both the public and the military saw the Egal policy of rapprochement to be tantamount to selling out the Somali territories and the Somali people to Ethiopia and Kenya. Furthermore, domestically the public was dissatisfied with the rampant corruption, nepotism and the relentless private pursuit that largely preoccupied the elected members in the Egal government. Eventually, the displeasure with the foreign policy of Premier Egal and the sudden assassination of the President of the Republic, Abdirashiiid Ali Sharmarke on 15 October 1969, precipitated the collapse of the civilian regime. Consequently, this paved the way for the military to topple the civilian government and take over the political power in the country on 21 October 1969.

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165 "... the most important political issue in post-independence Somali politics was the unification of all areas populated by Somalis into one country – a concept identified as pan-Somalism. It was presumed that this issue dominated popular opinion and that any government would fall if it did not demonstrate a militant attitude toward neighbouring countries that were seen as occupying Somali territory” (Nelson 1982:38).

166 According to Marte, “the retreat from the confrontational line in the foreign policy realm also removed the aspect of having to face a common external enemy, which had been an effective unifying factor among the Somalis. When this common external threat diminished, internal divisions and clan cleavages began to resurface, exacerbating the already fragile political stability” (Marte 1994:223).


169 As Abdi put it “one of the reasons why Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Egal’s government was brought down in 1969 had to do with the aggressive and often high-handed policy of ‘détente’ or ‘entente’ with Ethiopia and Kenya over the disputed territories. This policy brought Somalia no major benefits and it dashed the hopes of the Somalis living in the lost lands” (Abdi 1982:40). For a wider discussion of the politics of the military coup in Somalia in 1969, see I.M. Lewis “The Politics of the 1969 Somali Coup”, The Journal of Modern African Studies, vol.10, no.3 (1972): 383-408.
6.4. The Military Regime and Militarisation\textsuperscript{170} of the State

The military takeover of the state power not only resuscitated the politics of the Pan-Somali unity or what Adam called a "Somali irredentist nationalism" but\textsuperscript{171} also led to an aggressive military build-up in the country. To put it differently, the project of a Somali-wide public pursuit has been the foremost overriding factor which urged the militarisation of the state. Immediately after the coup, the new military regime abandoned the foreign policy stance of former civilian governments that was based on neutrality vis-à-vis the East-West power politics. Instead, the military government embarked on a different foreign policy, which began to tilt towards the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. This prompt change of the foreign policy in the country is what led Payton to suggest the tactic complicity of the Soviet Union behind the military coup in Somalia. In 1969 as Payton argued there was a conjuncture of events and changes which were global, regional and local as well as "a coincidence of interests' between the Somali Army Commander [Siad Barre] and Soviet strategic planners [that] resulted in the military coup" (Payton 1980:493).

At the time of the coup, hundreds of Soviet military advisers were present in Somalia. Some of these military advisers were in Somalia for close to a decade and the intelligence apparatus they set up there during those years must have been privy to the preparations of the coup d'etat in the country.\textsuperscript{172} A U.S. diplomat Raymond L. Thurston who served as ambassador to Somalia from 1965 to 1968, concurs somewhat with the guesswork of Payton. And this was how ambassador Thurston put it:

"was the seizure of power by the Somali army a purely internal affairs? Bearing in mind that its cadres had been trained in the Soviet Union and that a thousand or more Soviet advisers were intermingled with it down to the small-unit level, this should be dismissed as a cold warrior's question" (Thurston 1978:16).

Yet both Marte and Ottaway disagree with the idea of complicity of the Soviet military intelligentsia behind the coup. Marte contends that despite the presence of Soviet military advisers in the country, there is no concrete evidence which implicates the Russians in the coup.\textsuperscript{173} While according to Ottaway,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{170}In this study, militarisation is understood as a process whereby the expansion of the military establishment resulted in high and increased levels of military expenditure, army size and arms imports which is disproportionate to the total population of a nation and the level of its economic development. For a detailed discussion on this issue, see, The Military and Militarism in Africa, (eds.) Eboe Hutchful and Abdoulaye Bathily (Dakar: Codesria Book Series, 1998)
  \item \textsuperscript{171}For more discussion, see Hussein M. Adam "Somalia: Personal Rule, Military Rule and Militarism ",in The Military and Militarism in Africa, (Dakar: Codesria Book Series, 1998).
  \item \textsuperscript{172}According to Crozier, "the Soviet-Somali military relationship began in 1961 within about 18 months of Somalia gaining its independence. As in Egypt and other countries, the Russians gained their first foothold through Western reluctance to supply arms to a new State. Again, as in other countries, Soviet military aid enabled the Somali armed forces to enhance their power and prestige at the expense of the politicians" (Crozier 1975:4). For more insights, see Brian Crozier, “The Soviet Presence in Somalia”, in Conflict Studies, no 54, (London: February 1975).
  \item \textsuperscript{173}See further Fred Marte, Political Cycles in International Relations: The Cold War and Africa 1945-1990 (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994).
\end{itemize}

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“The impact of Soviet aid in training the army was major, but this should not be confused with influence. Not only is there no evidence that the Soviet Union influenced the policies of the Somali government, but there is no evidence either that it influenced the decision of Siad Barre and the other rebel officers to carry out a military coup d’etat. The coup, to be sure, benefited the Soviet Union in the long run” (Ottaway 1982:43).

Nonetheless, after the coup, the influence of the Soviets in the country certainly increased. More symbolically, the military regime changed the name of the Somali Republic to Somali Democratic Republic (SDR). Evidently, this new name further marked the leaning of the new regime to the left and indicated a cue or a similarity to that of the people’s democracies of Eastern Europe (Nelson 1982). Moreover, the military government, after taking over the state power proclaimed that ‘scientific socialism’ would be the guiding principle of social orientation and of the nation’s political and economic development. Furthermore, after the military coup, there was a clear sign of increased Soviet presence in the country. Crozier estimated the Russians in Somalia in the early 1970s to be about 3,600 in number (minus family dependants), of whom 1,200 to 1,400 were military personnel (Crozier 1975:4), while in the mid-1970s when the relationship between Somalia and the Soviet Union was at its height, the Russian military and civilian advisers in the country had reached between 5,000 and 6,000 in number (Ayyub 1980:145). More markedly, in the early 1970s, Soviet fleet visits became routine and frequent in Somalia.174 According to Crozier,

“The Soviet presence in Somalia must be considered against the expected reopening of the Suez Canal to shipping in 1975 and the steady build-up of a Russian Indian Ocean fleet since Britain’s decision in 1976 to withdraw its forces east of Suez. … In the Indian Ocean, and elsewhere, a strong Soviet fleet is an instrument of moral and material support for groups in power or seeking power and willing to work with the Russians; and of inhibition and discouragement for the independent minded. In this order of things, the new Soviet foothold in Somalia must be viewed in Moscow as a major strategic gain” (Crozier 1975:16-17).

It was during this period that high level visits between Mogadishu and Moscow took place. In November 1971, Siad Barre visited Moscow where he requested more military and economic aid. In return, Soviet Minister of Defense A.A. Grechko visited Somalia in February 1972, where he signed an agreement to improve the airstrip and the port facilities at Berbera. It was after this visit of Grechko that the real Soviet build-up of the Somali army and the transfer of sophisticated war material to Somalia actually began. On the diplomatic front, the close relationship between the military regime of the Somali Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union was further consolidated. The Soviet Union became the most important ally of the military regime in Somalia.175 In July 1974, this close alliance finally culminated in a special relationship: the twenty years’ Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation between Somalia and

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174 As Bell notes, “between 1970 and 1971 Soviet naval vessels made seven visits to the ports of the Persian Gulf, but twice as many to Berbera in the Somali Democratic Republic” (Bell 1975:402).

175 The military authority granted this special alliance with the Soviets believing this Somali proverb which says that: “either be a mountain or have a mountain to lean on”. This is in fact how the military regime of Somalia calculated its close relations with the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the United States who was the staunch ally of its principal adversaries in the region, Ethiopia and Kenya.
the Soviet Union. At that time, Somalia was the first sub-Saharan country to conclude such a high-level friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. Under the treaty, the Soviets would acquire base facilities at the strategic port of Berbera, located at the littoral of the Red Sea. In addition to this, the Soviets would also get full base rights and full access to all the airfields in the country that could enable the Russians to stage periodic naval reconnaissance flights over the Indian Ocean. In return, the Soviet Union guaranteed to train and arm generously the military personnel of the nation over the next ten years.

Consequently, with the help of the Russian military trainers and advisers, the Somali national army was almost doubled, from twelve thousand to twenty three thousand standing troops within a very short time from 1970 to 1975. During that same period, the Soviets poured large quantities of sophisticated weapons into the country. For example, according to International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) estimates, the Russians supplied to the Somali army about 250 medium tanks of which 150 were somewhat old T-34 and 100 were modern T-54/55 tanks. Furthermore, the Russians also equipped the Somali army with more than 50 Soviet-made MiG fighter aircraft. This in fact made both the Somali tank force and its combat airforce the largest in the continent of Africa during that period. The military regime of Somalia also diverted a great deal of the financial aid it received, which was a relatively high proportion of its budget, to arms deliveries and military purposes. For instance, between 1969 and 1978, the government expenditure on military purposes was twice that of education and health care, as shown in Table 3.

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176 This is how Nikolai Podgorny, President of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, who signed the treaty in Mogadishu, 11 July 1974 formulated the special relationship: “The friendship and co-operation treaty signed today between the Soviet Union and the Somali Democratic Republic... has been prepared by the entire course of the development of relations between the Soviet Union and Somalia. In 14 years our States have travelled a great path... to the present broad, equal and mutually advantageous co-operation, which ... covers virtually all spheres of life...” (Crozier 1975:2).


179 According to Crozier, “to place the military development in perspective it should be remembered that only ten years ago Somalia had an army of no more than 4,000 poorly equipped men, an even smaller navy than today, and no air force at all. The military equipment provided is increasingly sophisticated and can neither be used nor maintained without Russian help and spare parts” (Crozier 1975:8).
Table 3

Somalia: Percentages of GDP Allocated for Military, Health and Education, % of GDP ($ constant, 1977)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Military</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>13.8*</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Wartime figures.


Similarly, the military expenditure of the Somali government budget rose about 10 percent per year between 1963-1973. However, this 10 percent figure per year was too high for a domestic gross national product (GNP) which grew pathetically by a little less than 3 percent annually. According to Nelson, the overall expenditure of the Somali armed forces was estimated to have amounted per year to about 27 percent of total government recurrent budget from 1972 to 1977, 37.1 percent in 1978 and 39 percent in 1979 (Nelson 1982).  

Indeed, the consequences of this enormous military expenditure had a further debilitating effect on the poor economy of the country and the social welfare of the nation. More devastating, during the decade of 1970, the total arms deliveries that the military regime purchased, was estimated to have amounted to $960 million of the government budget, which increased to about 16 percent of GDP of the country per year (Mubarak 1996:12). In terms of the size, the military government built up a substantial national armed force that by 1976 expanded to thirty thousand military personnel, which was very high relative to the population in the country. Moreover, this huge size of the Somali armed forces that was estimated to be around one percent of the population was even higher than that of any other nation in sub-Saharan Africa (Nelson 1982 and Ricciuti 1995). Nonetheless, the military regime with the generous help of its Soviet patron continued to increase the size of the army force. On the eve of the Ethiopia-Somali war over Ogaden in 1977, the number of the Somali military personnel had grown to a 37,000-man force, which was a well-equipped force that could stand up to any

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180 For more discussion and a statistical account, see Harold D. Nelson (ed.) Somalia: A Country Study (Washington DC, Foreign Area Studies, American University, 1982).

181 As Khapoya writes, “military build-ups normally do not contribute to the wellbeing of the people, they bleed the countries, they retard economic development, they tempt increased use of violence against domestic populations, and they make regional armed conflict not only more likely but also more bloody and more deadly, if it occurs” (Khapoya 1982:30).
army in the region.\footnote{According to Marte, \textquotedblleft by the mid-1970s, there were from one thousand to four thousand Soviet military specialists attached to the Somali army, while between one thousand and two thousand four hundred Somali military men were sent to the Soviet Union for military training. With the help of the Soviet Union, the Somalis managed to implement a large-scale military build-up, providing it with both a quantitative and qualitative military edge over its neighbors, Ethiopia and Kenya (Marte 1994:228).} Even after the war when the army was terribly defeated and the Soviets abandoned Somalia, the military government continued further in building up the army force, which expanded to 120,000 in 1983, and consumed more than a fifth of the national budget (Geshekteer 1997 and Ricciuti 1995).\footnote{After the Soviet Union exited from Somalia, the United States came as a superpower patron and provided Somalia with about US $100 million of both economic and military aid from 1980 to 1988 (Adam 1998:389). For further discussion, see Ken Menkhau, \textquotedblleft US Foreign Assistance to Somalia: Phoenix from the Ashes?\textquotedblright\? \textit{Middle East Policy} 5, no. 2 (January 1997): 126.} This staggering Somali army, which became the second largest military force in the continent of Africa, was too big in a nation of seven to eight million people.\footnote{The Somali army was indeed highly disproportionate in that it even surpassed the army of Nigeria, a nation of about 100 million people.} In a nutshell, this is how the military government preparation of the irrederentist adventure has been the single determinant which increased the levels of military expenditure, army size and arms imports in the country. It is remarkable to note that the military government in Somalia could not afford to militarise the state staggeringly without generous aid by the Cold War protagonists at one time or another. Eventually, this military might prompted the military regime to wage a war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region in 1977-1978. In the end, the military regime of Somalia lost the war and most of its armaments were destroyed during the battle.\footnote{For more information on this issue, see Colin Legum and Bill Lee, \textit{The Horn of Africa in Continuing Crisis}, (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1979).}

6.5. Conclusion

Continuing the discussion in chapter four, I considered in this chapter the predicament of the colonial legacy that was bequeathed to the Somali political elite after independence in 1960. The colonial powers dismembered the country and the Somali people into different imperial frontiers in the late 19th century and that gravely impaired the collective destiny and cultural unity of the Somali society. Afterwards, the resolution of this inherited colonial problem was the primarily political preoccupation of the post-colonial Somali political leaders. It was also this dilemma that set the leadership on the course of embarking a very dangerous policy of irrederentist adventure. The prevailing Cold War politics during the post-colonial era made it possible for the Somali governments to build up and sustain a well equipped and very large army force, which militarised the state. In hindsight, it was possible that the circumstances of contemporary Somalia would have been different if the Cold War global tensions had not coincided with the birth of the Somali state. According to Marte,

\begin{quote}
\textit{\textquotedblleft The Cold War has strongly interfered with the process of decolonisation in the region and has, to a large extent, redirected the focus of the governments from a developmental to a strictly military orientation, leading to economic stagnation, internal political imbalances between the military and civilians, and civil and regional wars\textquotedblright\} (Marte 1994:267).
\end{quote}
It is nonetheless a truism to say that while the dramatic legacy of colonialism has given rise to the politics of Somali-wide public pursuit and irredentist misadventure, the deleterious overlay of the subsequent Cold War politics made the militarisation of the state possible. Thus, in this respect, both colonialism and the Cold War imperatives have gravely victimised the Somali people. For instance, since 1970s, the impact of the military build-up and the militarisation of the state in Somalia had been dramatic as it diverted the meagre national resources from social and economic development issues to very expensive military purposes. However, the bulk of the military expenditure did not provide benefits to the civilian population in terms of jobs or any other windfalls as it was partly used as lavish salaries for the defence personnel and was partly spent on importing arms from abroad. Therefore, as I demonstrated in chapter 5 while the continuity of the material deprivation led the political elite to siphon off the scarce national resources resulting in the bankruptcy of the state, the irredentist adventure of the tendency towards public pursuit on the other hand militarised the state. In a nutshell, the continuity of the material deprivation from the pre-colonial era and the change of the territorial integrity of the country wrought about by colonialism during the colonial period have in concert deleteriously affected the stability of the post-colonial state in Somalia. In the following chapter, I will explain how the pitfalls of the politics of private and public pursuit eventually led to the collapse of the state in 1991.

186 The Somalis also become victims, because of the ineptitude and the ignobility of the domestic political leadership.


188 Personnel payments of the Ministry of Defence constituted on average 80 per cent of the defence budget. This part of the budget averaged 1.5 million Somali shillings during the early 1960s. It remained relatively stagnant until the end of the 1970s, thereafter rising to 3.2 billion shillings in 1982/3 and 5.1 billion in 1986/7” (Adam 1998:376).