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


8.1. Introduction

As the state imploded, the ruling political elite degenerated into predatory warlords and rival faction leaders that dramatically put an end to the collective public pursuit of the Somali society. Consequently, since 1991 as there was no public cause to be pursued, private pursuit became the chief preoccupation of the contending political elite. Tragically, the incessant pursuit of private spoils plunged the whole of Somalia into a vicious spiral of violence and a disastrous civil war unprecedented in the history of the country.

In this chapter I will recount the events, which took place in the aftermath of the collapse of the state in 1991 and describe how these occurrences further complicated the reconciliation process and the resolution of the political problems in the country. The major events, which followed the collapse of the state, were the post-state civil war, the international military and civil intervention, and the failure of that intervention. In this chapter, I shall argue that initially the international community assumed the responsibility for the public pursuit of the Somali people during the intervention since the domestic political elite became a bunch of individuals with irreconcilable differences, totally immersed in the politics of private pursuit. However, while the international intervention was modestly successful in dealing with humanitarian exigency, its military and political operations were disastrous. The international intervention in Somalia failed ultimately because it was poorly conceived, poorly planned, poorly executed and was erroneously perceived to be a "quick fix" and a rapid exit operation. The erratic behaviour of the domestic political elite also contributed to the failure of the intervention. The warlords and faction leaders frustrated the initiatives for the Somali-wide public pursuit that the international community undertook as they were afraid that the activities geared to help the public would undermine the pursuit of their private gains.

8.2. The Post State Civil War

On 26 January 1991, as Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, finally collapsed, the reign of the military regime of Siad Barre came to an end. However, the clan-organized forces, the loose coalition of the United Somali Congress (USC), which defeated the military regime and celebrated that victory, then turned their guns on each other. The reason was that when Said Barre hurriedly fled the capital in a convoy of tanks, a power vacuum emerged. And this power vacuum was immediately filled when the Manifesto Group (the moderate Mogadishu intellectuals) appointed a businessman, Ali Mahdi Mohamed, as ‘interim president’. During the fighting, Ali Mahdi was the leader of the civilian wing of the USC. However, the

230 The public pursuit that the international community half-heartedly attempted in Somalia was limited only to humanitarian assistance, breaking the cycle of violence and restoring law and order domestically. This public pursuit is diametrically opposed to that pursued earlier by the Somali political elite which conducted an irredentist adventure aimed at achieving a Somali-wide territorial unity.
nomination of Ali Mahdi as a president annoyed General Mohamed Farah Aideed, the commander of the military wing and the chairman of the USC. Nevertheless, Aideed was not the only faction leader who rejected Ali Mahdi's leadership; the leaders of other clan factions around the country rebuffed him too. General Aideed then directly countered the leadership claims of Ali Mahdi by publicly declaring that he was the rightful person to take the mantle of the president of Somalia. Aideed unequivocally demanded to be the new president of Somalia claiming that the armed forces he was commandeering had routed the army of the military regime of Siad Barre.

This leadership dispute caused grave and irreparable damage to the fragile alliance of the USC Hawiyey sub-clans. It also created personal animosity between Aideed and Ali Mahdi and hostilities between their respective sub-clans. Gradually, as the conflict was becoming quite explosive, Italian diplomats and several regional leaders attempted to diffuse the situation and reconcile the quarrelling sub-clans at two meetings in Djibouti in May and June in 1991. Yet both attempts failed to reconcile them and in November 1991, a destructive fight broke out between the armed men of the two sub-clans in Mogadishu. The fighting continued for about four months and totally destroyed the public infrastructure of the capital city, from water pipelines, electrical powers to historical monuments. In an eyewitness account, Mohamed Sahnoun described the appalling destruction in Mogadishu, when he visited Somalia as the head of a UN fact-finding mission in 1992. According to Sahnoun, "as our plane landed on a small strip to the north of Mogadishu—the main airport being closed—and as we drove slowly towards the city, I could not believe my eyes. I had visited Somalia before, and what I was seeing now was a total disaster" (Sahnoun 1994:viii). The four months civil war also tragically took the lives of as many as 25,000 innocent civilians (Bradbury 1997:13). Eventually, the destructive battle divided Mogadishu into two parts, and a "Green Line" was drawn between the two warring sub-clan factions. While the armed militia of Ali Mahdi controlled the north of the capital, that of General Aideed controlled the areas in the south, such as the airport and seaport. The split of the USC alliance resulted in the emergence of the Somali National Alliance (SNA). This new alliance was formed by General Aideed to counter Ali Mahdi and his forces. As a result, the two Mogadishu-controlled militias resumed fierce clashes with each other, causing further destruction and more social havoc, particularly in the southern part of the country.

During the last months of 1991, neutral traditional elders made repeated attempts to mediate a cease-fire and reconcile the warring militias but they also failed. Consequently, as the conflict in the south remained unabated, northern Somalia seceded. The leadership of the Somali National Movement (SNM) in the north of the country declared the political independence of the region from the rest of the country. Northern Somalia then became the Republic of Somaliland. In fact, this SNM unilateral declaration of political independence for northern Somalia also contributed further to the disintegration of the state and the country.

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231 According to Terrence Lyons and Ahmed Samatar, "this conflict was a confused mixture of competition between factions of the USC, a personal leadership struggle between Aideed and Ali Mahdi, a fight between two subclans, the Habir Gedir and Abgal, and a desperate struggle to win public office and the financial benefits such positions promised" (Lyons and Ahmed Samatar 1995:22).


Tragically, the civil war, which had been going on largely in the south of the country from December 1991 to March 1992, caused the destruction of most farms and the agricultural land and that resulted in a widespread famine in the entire region. Consequently, many innocent civilians lost their lives because of starvation and hunger-related diseases until the television screens across the globe started to show harrowing footage of extremely emaciated children, which depicted the appalling human suffering in the country. Eventually, these horrific television images finally drew the attention of the world community to the plight of the Somali people incarcerated in a self-inflicted and destructive civil war.

Yet the belated response of the international community to this human tragedy was half-hearted and timid. The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 733, on January 23, 1992, which was in fact the first resolution on Somalia since the crisis began in the country a year ago. The resolution requested the international community to provide more humanitarian aid to the country, called for the imposition of a total arms embargo on Somalia and urged the warring parties to agree to a cease-fire and to reconcile their differences through peaceful means. This first resolution was followed by second and third resolutions on Somalia. However, concrete action does not automatically follow the UN resolutions as the member states and international agencies which are requested for assistance always need more time to respond because of the cumbersome bureaucratic clearances and logistical problems among other things. As a result, when the UN Security Council finally authorized the implementation of the ninety-day plan of action for emergency humanitarian assistance in Somalia as late as October, the food aid that was flown in was too little and for many hapless civilians it came too late.

On the political front, the Secretary General invited the representatives of some of the conflicting parties to come to New York in February 1992, and sign what observers call “a vague cease-fire” (Lyons and Ahmed Samatar 1995:30). As a follow up, the UN Secretary General dispatched James Jonah (a Sierra Leone UN diplomat) as a special envoy to Somalia. Jonah mediated a further cease-fire, which was signed only by two rival factional leaders, General Mohamed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi in Mogadishu on March 3, 1992. As the cease-fire was precariously holding, the Secretary General appointed Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun of Algeria as his special representative for Somalia in April 1992. Ambassador Sahnoun, a seasoned diplomat who had been working in the region earlier for almost a decade was indeed the right choice at the time. Moreover, the appointment of Sahnoun heralded the establishment of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM, which later became UNOSOM I). Sahnoun skilfully approached the political problem in Somalia by starting first a series of peace initiatives at local levels. His approach was to build the peace settlement from the “bottom up”. This was the most sensible strategy since the civil war had largely broken down the social fabric of the Somali society. Sahnoun also understood the importance of the existing local social structures and networks of the clan system and used them purposefully in order to find a resolution to the political problem in the country. His focus was on the process and, in that strategy he opted for a painstaking negotiation rather than a quick fix outcome. In fact, his “bottom up” approach to the conflict helped him win trust among

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234 According to Lyons and Ahmed Samatar (1995:23), “the SNM’s actions contributed to the dissolution of Somalia as a nation-state, the destruction of pan-Somalism, and the acceleration of the balkanisation of northeast Africa”

235 See further, the UN Chronicle, (June 1992): 23.

236 According to Mohamed Sahnoun, “Not only was the UN assistance program very limited, it was also so slowly and inadequately delivered that it became counterproductive. Fighting erupted over the meagre food supplied and introduced new elements of animosity and violence” (Sahnoun 1994:17).
many Somalis and as he explained to me, enabled him to solve many intractable problems. For example, Sahnoun’s sustained peace dialogue with a broad array of local actors helped him gain a diplomatic breakthrough, which made it possible for the conflicting parties to respect the cease-fire.

Sahnoun having a vision well-tuned to local realities both past and present, adopted an all-inclusive and broad-based strategy. He involved in the reconciliation process a broad spectrum of individuals representing diverse sections of the society such as military leaders, elders, religious leaders, traders and businessmen, journalists, intellectuals for peace and women’s associations among others. These prominent personalities who felt that they were empowered to do so, used their social and political clout in the community to facilitate the peace dialogue and ensure that the truce remained un-violated. Unfortunately, both the process and the innovative diplomatic skills of Sahnoun were not given enough time to take their course as he was forced to resign in October 1992. Sahnoun was forced to resign because he openly criticized the obstructions and the UN Bureaucratic haggling, which in his view impeded efforts to feed the starving population in the country. Sahnoun was especially bitter because when he pleaded for more time from the UN headquarters in New York to continue his diplomatic efforts, he was told that his peace initiative had so far produced meagre results. Moreover, Sahnoun held the view that the UN Administration was dragging its feet, as it did not realise the gravity of the tragedy unfolding in Somalia. Furthermore, there was a personality clash between Sahnoun and the UN Secretary- General Boutros-Ghali.

Finally, as Sahnoun disappeared from the political theatre in Somalia, his “bottom up” approach to the conflict in Somalia as well as his focus on process were abandoned. The UN diplomats who replaced Sahnoun alternatively opted for a “top down” approach, which promoted the legitimacy and the political power of the warlords, and power-hungry urbanized minority elites.

After he left the UN, Sahnoun wrote a book which he entitled: “Somalia: The Missed Opportunities” (1995). The central thesis of the book is that: “if the international community had intervened earlier and more effectively in Somalia, much of the catastrophe that has unfolded could have been avoided” (Sahnoun 1994:xiii). In the book, Sahnoun related three successive opportunities that the international community missed to prevent the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. The first opportunity came in 1988 when the clan-based uprising emerged in the north of the country and the military regime of Siad Barre savagely repressed the revolt. The international community failed to intervene and watched as the national military waged a war against its people. This conflict escalated into a long dragging civil war and largely contributed to the disintegration of the country. The second chance presented itself in May 1990, when a coalition of over 100 Somali politicians, intellectuals and businessmen, signed a manifesto, which called for a conference of a nation-wide political reconciliation. Again, the international community failed to support this timely initiative of the Manifesto Group and to broker a peace settlement. The third chance came immediately


238 “A frustrated Shanoun criticised the UN officials for its bureaucratic inertia and pleaded for more time from New York to secure Aideed’s consent for the deployment of the 3500 peacekeepers. But the UN leadership was getting ‘very impatient’ with Shanoun’s meagre results. Indeed, a suspicion existed within the UN Secretariat that Sahnoun was misreading the Somali situation” (Patman 1995:92).

239 “In October 1992 Sahnoun, frustrated with the UN’s response and at odds with the secretary-general, publicly criticised the United Nations and resigned” (Bradbury 1997:15).
after the military regime of Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991. According to Sahnoun, the UN and its specialized agencies, instead of remaining in the country and attempting to promote reconciliation between the conflicting parties, left Somalia to fend for itself.

The other message in the book of Sahnoun, which is a general lesson to all of us, is that we must prevent and mediate in local crises and internal conflicts at an early stage before they become too costly and unmanageable as the tragedy in Somalia clearly exemplifies. The book of Sahnoun must be recommended to anyone engaged in or concerned with early intervention and preventive diplomacy in conflict situations. In his case study on Somalia, Sahnoun strongly convinces us that adequate and timely action can possibly prevent conflict to further deterioration.

The UN, coming to Somalia too late and being itself too disorganized, failed to stop the violence in the country. In mid-1992, in addition to the ongoing political conflict, violence also erupted over the limited international food aid. The food supply was meager and inadequate and that increased the insecurity and produced even more violence. The cutthroat competition and the violence that the food scarcity unleashed made it impossible to deliver the food to those who needed it most. The violence also risked the lives of the international relief workers given the task of delivering and distributing the food aid. The 500 UN peacekeepers stationed in the country were powerless and even failed to control the seaports and secure the deliveries of the food aid. “The worsening security situation was highlighted on November 24 when a World Food Program ship carrying 10,000 tons of wheat was shelled as it tried to dock in the port capital, Mogadishu” (Africa Report, January-February 1993:5). As this dire situation in the country was becoming grimmer day by day, many relief agencies were forced to appeal for strong military protection for the humanitarian relief operations.

8.3. The International Military Intervention

The constant looting of the humanitarian relief aid by warlords and gangs of bandits, prompted the UN Security Council to endorse Resolution 794, which authorized the deployment of a U.S. led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) in Somalia in December 1992. The resolution emphasized that the violent conflict in Somalia constituted a threat to international peace and mandated the UNITAF to use “all necessary means to establish as soon as possible a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia”. President George Bush explaining his decision to send U.S. troops to Somalia described the intervention as a humanitarian mission to “save thousands of innocents from death”. The UNITAF mission to Somalia, which was codenamed Operation Restore Hope, had a limited and specific mandate. The goal of the mission according to Bush was to “open the supply routes, to get the

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240 As Sahnoun writes, “most of the time serious opportunities to mediate and check crises at an early stage have gone unheeded. Occasionally, when crises have reached important dimensions and affected large populations, hasty, and ill-prepared emergency relief operations have been put in place while a few timid attempts at reconciliation have been initiated. Even in most of the recent cases, such as Rwanda, Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Somalia, Cambodia, Afghanistan, and Bosnia, the international community and the United Nations (UN) have begun to take serious initiatives only when large-scale civil wars have engulfed the countries and human tragedies have become overwhelming” (Sahnoun 1994:xi)


food moving, and prepare the way for a UN peace-keeping force to keep it moving". At its peak, the UNITAF had 37,000 troops in the country of which 26,000 were Americans.

The UNITAF intervention in Somalia was not without critics. The troops did not intervene as traditional peacekeepers, because that would have required two preconditions: peace to keep and an invitation from a host government. In Somalia, at the time of the intervention both preconditions were missing. There was no government and no peace to keep. Consequently, according to Strobe Talbott, "once a country utterly loses its ability to govern itself, it also loses its claim to sovereignty and should become a ward of the United Nations" (Time Magazine, December 14, 1992:31). However, this justification was contested by observers of Somalia such as Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal who argued that the intervention was not properly handled because there was no prior consultation with the Somali people. Somalia is an independent and sovereign country and the Somalis are the nation whether they have a government or not. Both observers have written several reports and articles in which they strongly opposed the nature and the need of the military intervention in the country. Rakiya Omaar, a Somali native who openly opposed the intervention on the media such as the CNN was fired from her consultancy position with the Africa Watch because she refused to temper her critical stand.

Although no one questions the humanitarian drive for the mission, the U.S.-led international force intervened in Somalia with an agenda far broader than is attested. The new agenda as spelled out by Bruce W. Nelan in Time Magazine is that this U.S. spearheaded military force "will be conducting an experiment in world order: armed peacekeeping, rather than peacekeeping" (Time Magazine, December 14, 1992:23). This armed peacekeeping, which was the international community's first experiment in the aftermath of the Cold War, is what Madeleine Albright, the U.S. representative to the United Nations, once called "assertive multilateralism". Thus, Somalia was a test case and success would have encouraged future UN military intervention in hot-spot areas elsewhere. Furthermore, the operation in Somalia was easy, cheap and militarily doable as compared to Bosnia since the Somali ragtag militia could not match a determined, well-equipped, U.S. -led international force. The other reason for the American troops to participate in the mission in Somalia was the conviction that the operation would be time limited while the possible casualties were assessed to be very low (Patman 1995).

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243 ibid: 5

244 They co-authored an article in which they argued that: "Military humanitarian intervention has its own logic, which is difficult to reconcile with the demands of peacekeeping and reconstruction. It is never 'clean' nor quick. It cannot solve humanitarian crises; it can only alter them". They therefore pleaded that "relief and diplomatic interventions should be done earlier and better than they have been in the past, so as to make military intervention unnecessary". For further discussion, see Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, Can Military Intervention Be "Humanitarian"? Middle East Report (March-June 1994): 3-8.

245 According to Bruce W. Nelan, "some experts interpret going into Somalia as a test that, if it succeeds, might encourage further involvement in the jigsaw of republics that used to make up Yugoslavia" (Time, December 14, 1992): 25.

246 This is the argument made by the U.S. military decision-makers such as the Defense Secretary Dick Cheney when Washington speaks about a jolt of military muscle, swift and simple job of pacification in Somalia. See further, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and General Colin Powell, "U.S. Mission to Somalia is Necessary and Clear", USIA, East Asia/Pacific Wireless File, (4 December 1992): 12.
Regarding the humanitarian purpose which was to create a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian relief, the UNITAF intervention in Somalia was positive in its short-term goal. Within a short time, the mission succeeded in getting the food moving and reaching the famished population residing in the hard-hit towns and villages without incident. In addition to that, anxiety about food scarcity diminished in the minds of the people. As a result, in the market places the food prices declined to a level at which many could afford to buy. Furthermore, security was improved and the looting of relief supplies and food convoys practically stopped. More tangibly, the UNITAF engineers did significant civic tasks by rehabilitating some of the debilitated infrastructure in the country. For example, the engineers repaired more than 1800 km of roads, refurbished 14 water wells and restored two airfields.\(^{247}\)

Thus, with its short-term humanitarian focus, the UNITAF intervention was a success. But a discrepancy arose between its mandate and its long-term agenda. Both issues became a dispute between the UNITAF and UNOSOM I. Nonetheless, Bush repeatedly stated in public that the UNITAF mission would be in Somalia “only as long as necessary to establish a secure environment” for humanitarian efforts. “We believe that prolonged operations will not be necessary,” (Time Magazine, December 21, 1992:20). But the UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali had a different view.\(^{248}\) In the Security Council, Boutros-Ghali said in a statement to the Somali people, shortly before the first troops landed, that the UN was acting “in the cause of security, humanitarian relief and political reconciliation”. It is because of this broader agenda that Boutros-Ghali insisted that the American-led intervention force must disarm the warring clans, clear the mines in the north of the country, train the Somali police force to maintain civil order, restore some kind of central authority and remain in Somalia until these missions were accomplished (Newsweek, December 21, 1992:8).\(^{249}\) Only when these tasks were completed, would UN peacekeeping force take over the responsibility of Somalia and replace UNITAF, according to Boutros-Ghali. But the Washington Administration was adamant and argued that this broader agenda, which indeed required a long-term commitment, was beyond the narrow and limited mandate that the American troops were given in the country. The troops were there simply to provide enough security to permit the delivery of food and other relief supplies. Even President Bush when he visited Somalia and addressed the Somalis said that, “we come to your country with one reason only: to enable the starving to be fed. Once the food flows freely, the U.S. will go home” (Time Magazine, December 14, 1992:25).

The disagreement over the mandate and the long-term agenda of the mission between the U.N. and the policymakers in Washington was a testimony that the operation from the start was doomed to fail.\(^{250}\) Broadly speaking, the mission did not work out a coherent strategy to deal with the multiple problems in Somalia. Furthermore, the agenda of the mission was not clearly defined and the agreements between the UNOSOMI and the UNITAF were vaguely formulated. In particular, the shortcoming of the UNITAF humanitarian policy was that they


underestimated the depth of the collapse of the state structure in the country.\textsuperscript{251} For instance, the UNITAF mission to Somalia was to tackle the humanitarian aspect of the problem but not the political crisis that produced it. As a result, they focused on the consequences rather than on the causes, which should have been addressed and attended to beforehand. Unfortunately, focusing on the humanitarian crisis without simultaneously addressing the underlying political conflict, failed to end the turmoil in the country. The important question is: how can a humanitarian catastrophe be solved in a situation where there is neither security nor political settlement?

The international military intervention in Somalia was a major opportunity for disarmament, which was an essential prerequisite for peace and political reconciliation. The large stockpiles of arms, which were dumped in the country during the Cold War era remained the main threat to the peace and security of the Somali population.\textsuperscript{252} This is the tragic legacy that Somalia inherited from the East-West proxy wars. The superpowers left behind an enormous quantity of high-powered weaponry, which turned the entire land of Somalia into an arsenal depot. In this respect, systematic and effective disarmament was what the Somali civilians were hoping to be the foremost priority of the international forces. More optimistically, ordinary Somalis viewed disarmament "as the key to prevent another man-made famine, to facilitating political reconciliation, allowing alternative civic structures to flourish and undermine the warlords and to encouraging economic rehabilitation" (Omaar and de Waal, 1993:20). Yet, UNITAF made no real attempt to disarm the gangs, the militias and the warlords. While the UN was insisting that disarmament should be the integral part of the humanitarian operation, the UNITAF commanders on the ground were saying that such a task was not on their agenda. Eventually, the international forces confiscated some weapons but the whole exercise was sporadic and half-hearted. More detrimentally, UNITAF's chaotic disarmament efforts achieved nothing and even became counterproductive.\textsuperscript{253} It was counterproductive for the simple reason that the random confiscation of arms left the civilian householders and shopkeepers living in the cities and towns prey to violent armed militias roving around. Even before the disarmament task began militia groups secretly moved most of their arsenals outside the cities and hid them in the countryside.\textsuperscript{254} The result was increased insecurity among the defenceless civilians against gun-toting marauding militias. This is what one shopkeeper in Bokhara market place in Mogadishu lamented: "merchants were expecting the Americans to strength the security of the market. But this did not happen because they only


\textsuperscript{252} "Thanks to the cold war, Somalia is awash in guns. After allowing the Soviet Union to arm them, the Somalis switched sides, allowing the Americans to arm them again. Then came two years of civil war and social collapse. Now armed robbery is just about the only trade that still offers employment to thousands of armed men. Lasting peace cannot be imposed unless most of them are disarmed" (\textit{Newsweek}, December 21, 1992): 8.

\textsuperscript{253} For a well analysed critique of the UNITAF failure to effectively and systematically disarm the clan factions and the bandits, see Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, Somalia: Operation Restore Hope: A Preliminary Assessment (London: African Rights, May 1993): 20-27.

\textsuperscript{254} "Nowhere were the problems caused by the American refusal to face up to the implications of its decision to intervene greater than in the area of disarmament. The U.S. had the greatest amount of military assets on the ground when the roughly thirty thousand troops landed in December 1992 and therefore the greatest capability to disarm the belligerent forces. The U.S. told the warlords, however that they could keep their weapons as long as they moved out of the city limits or to special cantonment areas controlled by warlord troops. A concentrated effort to remove or destroy the heavy arms present would have been possible and would have sent a very strong message at the beginning of the operation that the U.S. and UN were serious about restoring order" (Clarke and Herbst 1995:6-7).
disarmed merchants guarding the properties; while the thieves are still holding their guns and can still loot whenever they wish” (African Rights, 1993: 24).

With respect to political reconciliation, the intervention of UNITAF did not promote the peace dialogue in any significant manner. From the beginning, the UNITAF position was utterly clear: these difficult projects of political reconciliation and state building were beyond its mandate. They were regarded as the tasks of the UNOSOM II after UNITAF withdrew from the country. Yet despite this clear stand, the UN and the U.S. diplomats could not resist meddling in the political reconciliation process of the country. Their involvement in the political conflict had indeed aggravated the whole process in three respects. Firstly, their diplomacy derailed the “bottom up” political dialogue that Mohamed Sahnoun had already worked out diligently with the civic groups – clan elders, religious leaders, intellectuals, women’s groups, etc. Instead, they opted for a “top down” approach and attempted to impose political solutions from above. Secondly, their peace mediation efforts deliberately promoted the warlords, which most Somalis viewed to be war criminals that should be arrested and brought to an international court of justice. For instance, Ambassador Robert Oakley, the U.S. special envoy to Somalia openly reiterated that he had no intention of entering into negotiations with the warlords. Yet, Oakley sought the cooperation of the warlords as he brokered a temporary cease-fire between General Aidid and Ali Mahdi on 11 December 1992. More spectacular, during the signing of the agreement, Oakley publicly embraced the two warlords and that indeed gave them a spurious legitimacy as political leaders.

Furthermore, the UN diplomats sponsored a succession of peace conferences in Addis Ababa from January to March 1993, in which the self-made warlords played the predominant role. However, these costly and superimposed peace talks did not achieve anything, since after each meeting, the reconciliation points agreed to were violated by the very warlords and the clan faction leaders who signed them. One can argue that the UN diplomats hastily attempted to bring peace to Somalia through the appeasement of the warlords, albeit without success.

However, the immediate consequence of the re-empowerment of the warlords was that their rehabilitation badly impaired the efforts of the local civil initiatives. As Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal summed up, the political reconciliation had repeatedly failed in the country because it lacked (a) domestic mechanisms to enforce the implementations of the agreement, (b) the pre-existence of political structures to put pressures on the signatories to keep the agreement, and (c) economic incentives to offer the warlords concrete interests to abide by.

In short, the international intervention in Somalia helped to provide food to the starving, but failed to disarm the clan militias and/or initiate an appropriate peace dialogue and political reconciliation among the conflicting political elites.

255 By contrast, the diplomatic strategy of Sahnoun was to gradually weaken the power and the political role of the warlords. He was also exploring the possibility of creating an alternative leadership.

256 According to de Waal and Omaar, “by rushing to embrace the two warlords who had wreaked so much destruction on Mogadishu and Somalia, the US conferred an entirely spurious legitimacy on two men reviled by most Somalis as war criminals. The meeting was a boost to both of them. Both Somalis and experienced foreign aid workers expressed shock at the speed with which Ambassador Oakley embraced Aidid and Ali Mahdi” (1993:30).

257 According to Michael Maren (1996: 202), “the UN paid massive hotel bills, flew warlords and their entourage to Addis Ababa, Nairobi, and Djibouti, and literally begged them to put their signatures on documents. Mohammed Ali Mahdi and Aidid used these meetings not to make peace with each other but as political conventions, where they lobbied and coerced other faction leaders, trying to convince them to sign on to a winning ticket”.

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8.4. United Nations Operation in Somalia

On 4 May 1993, UNITAF handed over the operation of Somalia to the second United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II). The transfer of power was authorised by the Security Council in Resolution 814 under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which was adopted on 26 March 1993. Under the resolution, the manpower of UNOSOM II was expanded to a multinational force of 28,000 military personnel and 3,000 civilians from 33 different countries. The resolution also gave UNOSOM II the power to enforce peace, disarm and demobilise all the armed groups and bring all the fighting in the country to an end. Furthermore, the resolution widened the mission of UNISOM II and granted it a broad mandate to reform the economy, political and civil institutions of Somalia. In other words, the responsibility of the new mission was not only to ensure the delivery of humanitarian relief but also to help the recovery of the domestic economy, to promote peace and security, to broker reconciliation between the warring protagonists and to rebuild political institutions. Thus, while the UNITAF mission had a limited and short-term goal, the operation of UNOSOM II was unlimited and had a long-term agenda. Furthermore, while the operation of UNITAF was a peacekeeping mission, that of the UNOSOM II became a peace-enforcement mission. And as was critically argued, the expansion of the UNOSOM II mission was sweepingly ambitious and was not based on a sensible policy. It was sweepingly ambitious because the UNOSOM II attempted to shoulder the responsibility of "nation building" in Somalia, which was a daunting feat. UNOSOM had neither the resources nor the organisational ability to initiate a long-term nation building programme in the country. Nonetheless, the agenda behind this ambitious operation of wholesale restructuring of Somali society was not primarily dictated by the domestic conditions in Somalia but more by international global concerns. As Mark Bradbury writes, “at the end of the Cold War, and in the wake of the Gulf War, Somalia became a testing ground for the international community’s response to conflict and humanitarian crisis in the ‘new world order’. UNOSOM II’s policies were thus driven more by international political concerns than by the situation in Somalia” (Bradbury 1997:16).

The operation with which UNOSOM II was entrusted was enormous and in reality was untenable. The mission did not have a clear political agenda, was minimally prepared and had no sufficient resources or the ability to tackle the daunting challenge of restoring order in Somalia. In fact what the UNOSOM II was asked to undertake was what the UNITAF failed or had been unable to resolve during the period of its operation. UNOSOM II was asked to disarm the population and also create a stable political environment in the country. Consequently, the attempts to realise these difficult tasks created tension as warlord Aideed aggressively challenged the authority and the new, expanded mandate of UNOSOM II. General Aideed fearing to be politically marginalized, used his radio to broadcast hostile propaganda against the UNOSOM administration in the country. This public incitement against the operations of the UNOSOM finally resulted in a showdown on 5 June 1993 when armed militias apparently associated with warlord Aideed ambushed and brutally killed 24


Pakistani peacekeepers while they were inspecting an ammunition depot. Immediately after this outrageous killing, the Security Council adopted Resolution 837, which authorized “all necessary measures against all those responsible”. The resolution implicitly indicated Aideed to be the person behind the attack against the U.N. peacekeeping force. Admiral Jonathan Howe, the UN special envoy in charge of UNOSOM II, declared Aideed a wanted outlaw and ordered that he should be captured and arrested. After that warrant, Aideed became a fugitive and the target of UNOSOM II’s primary mission. The manhunt to find Aideed however created more violence between the UNOSOM forces and his militiamen. In retaliation, the UNOSOM forces undertook punitive actions and staged a series of military strikes on buildings occupied by Aideed supports in south Mogadishu. As a result, this escalated clashes, which developed into a continuing guerrilla war that took the lives of at least 56 UN soldiers and several hundred Somalis from June to September 1993. After this battle, the credibility of UNOSOM was questioned. In the eyes of many Somalis, UNOSOM lost its neutrality in the Somali clan warfare, and as one observer put it, became perceived as “another faction and Admiral Howe as another warlord”.

The manhunt for Aideed bungled the purpose of the mission and totally derailed its original agenda. The mission became preoccupied with short-term exigencies and was no longer concerned with the long-term project mandated to implement it. Furthermore, UNOSOM effectively abandoned its political mission and opted for a military policy to pacify the country. UNOSOM chose for the military option rather than diplomacy in order to neutralise the violent gun-toting men loyal to the fugitive General Aideed. However, the military coercion failed to tame the rag-tag militia force, which the military planners contemptuously dismissed as no match for the well-trained, well-equipped and determined U.S.-led international forces. The UNOSOM forces (with all their might) not only bogged down in their efforts to subdue the militias but also failed to capture Aideed, whose continued evasion of arrest attested to the UN’s wider failures in Somalia.

The UNOSOM military policy in Somalia, which was based on the concept of making peace by making war, was a disaster. It failed to materialise into anything for the simple reason that the UN peacekeeping forces fell to squabbling among themselves. The multi-national

262 According to Lyons and Ahmed Samatar (1995: 58), “the weak, incomplete, and inconsistent U.S.-UN political strategy to encourage political reconciliation became irrelevant in the aftermath of the attack on the Pakistanis. UNOSOM and, in particular, the autonomous and U.S.-commanded Quick Reaction Force began a campaign to capture Aideed. U.S. forces bombed and strafed sections of Mogadishu and alienated much of the population”.
263 See Bradbury (1997:17).
265 According to Jim Hoagland, “In Somalia, the United States has been applying force without diplomacy. This is the flip side of the coin of Bosnia, where diplomacy without force is being used”. See his article, Firepower Diplomacy in an Awkward African Setting, The Washington Post, (July 19, 1993).
266 For a further discussion on this point, see, “Somalia: If you are not part of the solution”, Africa Confidential, vol. 34 no.19 (24 September 1993).
troops stationed in Somalia had a difference of interests and that plagued their working relationship. For instance, some of the commanders of the international forces had even established the policy of clearing the UN orders by their respective governments before acting upon them.269 In a nutshell, the failure of the international troops to act together in a constructive framework has completely undermined the military success of the mission.270

Unfortunately, the military policy even killed the top-down political reconciliation process that the UNOSOM diplomats had set in motion in the country. The UNOSOM administration proposed programmes aimed to assist in the formation of legal and judicial institutions. They also presented a blueprint to establish representative democratic government at national and regional level. Furthermore, they promised to organise free and fair elections and ensured that the international standards of human rights and justice would be promoted. On the humanitarian side, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs drew up a programme, which was intended to assist refugees and displaced persons to return home safely. With this proposal, UNOSOM secured donor pledges of US$130 million at a UN Conference on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia in March 1993. However, all these political and humanitarian projects were halted because of the military policy that UNOSOM opted to pursue. This hard-line military priority continued unabated until 3 October 1993, when a battle between U.S. soldiers and gunmen loyal to Aided resulted in carnage. In the gun-battle, 18 U.S. army rangers were killed, 73 were wounded, and hundreds of Somali lives were lost.271 This terrible tragedy confirmed the fact that the UN’s mission in Somalia had gone horribly wrong. After this debacle, president Clinton set March 31, 1994, as a deadline for the American troops to withdraw from Somalia, and UNOSOM suspended its manhunt for Aided.

More problematic, the presence of the UNOSOM administration in the country not only enhanced the political profiles and status of the warlords and faction leaders but also enriched them financially. The UN in Somalia became an “industry”. It generated revenue and wealth with which the warlords in the south, particularly General Aided, used to finance their violent conflicts. Michael Maren’s article, For Somalia’s Sake, Get the UN Out has aptly made this point crystal clear.272 According to Maren, “in the most violently contested areas, the UN presence means jobs, contracts and money. The United Nations rents houses, hires trucks and issues millions of dollars in contracts and sub-contracts to businessmen with close ties to the warlords.” A good example of this was Mohammed Sheikh Osman, a former finance minister of the Siad Barre regime, who had rented out several mansions he owned to UN personnel. For one of the compounds, he received $70,000 per month in rent from the UN. Politically, Osman was aligned to the most violent faction in the south led by Aided. But he was not the only one. There were many other war merchants who overnight turned themselves into rich businessmen for the services they provided to the UN garrison in


272 For more information, see International Herald Tribune (July 1994): 7.
Mogadishu. For these war merchants, continuation of the conflict was profit and prosperity, and financial support they provided to the warlords was what perpetuated the factional fighting. Thus, the presence of the UN administration in the country indirectly aided and prolonged the factional conflict.

The escalating factional conflicts and the military enforcement policy of the UNOSOM finally provoked an outcry. Aid agencies and relief officials began protesting that the militarised violence orchestrated by the international troops derailed the original mandate of the intervention – humanitarian aid. UNOSOM’s excessive force hampered the humanitarian activities of the relief workers. Furthermore, the UNOSOM military approach was widely condemned while some of the international forces were reported to have committed serious violations against human rights. These scathing accusations then prompted the UNOSOM administration to abandon its military strategy and focus on political and humanitarian objectives. But it was already too late. The Security Council decided in early November 1994 to withdraw all the UN troops from Somalia by 31 March 1995. Despite its heavy military cost the U.S. and UN mission in Somalia was a total failure. Regrettably, the UN departed from Somalia in a situation which in fact was not better than the conditions which urged its intervention in the first place. The UN left Somalia, Somalis started debating the consequence. Some argued that the clan civil war would resume again, while others maintained that the conflict would drastically reduce since the presence of the UN in the country contributed to fuelling the violence rather than extinguishing it. In retrospect, the presence of the UN in the country was a plague rather than a blessing. After the UN abandoned Somalia, the violent conflict in the south of the country subsided as faction leaders and warlords lost both of their political clout and the financial resources they needed to wage wars. The new situation then forced some faction leaders and warlords to ensure that peace and security prevailed in the areas they controlled. The domestic tranquillity, which they created, permitted reconciliation at the local and at the regional levels to be initiated. A bottom up peace dialogue and reconciliation process was revived and pursued. This gradual community building process eventually resulted in the formation of the Puntland regional autonomy in the northeast of the country in August 1998. The formation of the Puntland Administration, although it is not yet effective, is a development of building Somalia from locality and regional levels; and there are attempts to be replicated in other areas of the country. Already, certain parts of the country such as in the Bay and Bakol areas in the south are also in the process of forming regionally based local autonomy along the lines of the Puntland Administration. However, the fear is that the newly established Transitional National Government (TNG) constituted at the centre in August 2000, which was imposed at the top, may disturb or slow down these important regional initiatives aimed at building the state from below. It remains to be seen how the two processes can be reconciled.

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274 As Michael Maren (1996: 205) writes, “there is almost no evidence that the United States and UN were ever there, little trace of the $4 billion that was spent”.

275 Dr. Omar Ma’alim Mohamed, Interview, June 9, 1996 Addis Ababa.


8.5. Conclusion: The Lessons Learned from the Somalia Experience

“The new world order was born in Somalia, and quickly died there” (Jeffrey Bartholot, Newsweek International, January 29, 2001).

The intervention in Somalia was the first mission that the international community had undertaken after the end of the Cold War in 1989. UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali personally initiated the intervention in order to revitalise the organisation and upgrade its capability. He wanted to prepare the organisation for a new global role and it was presumed that the success in Somalia would invigorate the UN for future global policing. Thus, in a broader global context, Somalia was an experiment for building the new world order that the Administration of President Bush envisioned in the early 1990’s. Unfortunately, the UN intervention in Somalia had failed terribly and disappointed not only the Secretary General but also many other international and regional policy makers. Boutros-Ghali, badly shaken by the UN fiasco in Somalia, tempered his optimistic agenda for peace that he had outlined earlier. Perhaps the UN intervention in Somalia could have been a success if the intervention had taken place before the political crises shattered the state structures into a state of ‘worst-case scenario’. There are lessons that can be learned from the failure of the UN intervention in Somalia for future peacekeeping operations elsewhere.

First, the UN intervention in Somalia failed because the operation was launched too late. Although the international community was aware of the impending disaster in Somalia, they neglected to prevent it. They also failed to employ timely diplomatic intervention and missed serious opportunities, which time and again presented themselves as that Mohamed Sahnoun outlined in his book that would perhaps have defused the violence and limited the political disaster. In this respect, the international community let the conflict in Somalia drag on till it fragmented the central authority and the state disintegrated entirely. In other words, the enduring violence destroyed all the vestiges of state institutions. Eventually, when the international community hesitantly and half-heartedly intervened in Somalia, the situation in the country was beyond repair and so grave that the operation became counterproductive. The international community should have intervened in Somalia at an earlier stage in order to avert the conflict. The lesson we can learn from this vain last minute attempt is the overriding importance of early intervention and preventive diplomacy if an internal conflict is to be effectively checked before it becomes endemic and unmanageable. This is a daunting challenge for the UN as there are nowadays many simmering and even erupting internal conflicts around the world which the UN as an institution can hardly do anything about without the commitment and cooperation of its member countries. Nonetheless, a good

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279 This is what Robert G. Patman writes “the UN operation in Somalia has been a bitter disappointment to those in the international community who saw it as a model for dealing with the disorder and conflicts of the post-Cold War world” (Patman 1995:101).

280 See his second publication, An Agenda for Peace, 2d ed. (New York: UN Department of Public Information, 1995).


282 Mohamed Sahnoun (1994).
example of preventive diplomacy is the current mediation effort by Nelson Mandela in the conflict in Burundi. This timely mediation has so far served to manage the conflict in Burundi and prevent a full-blown civil war in that country.

Second, the UN intervention in Somalia was a fiasco because the international community underestimated the depth of the state collapse in Somalia. They failed to comprehend that the political disorder in Somalia was not only the absence of a government but was also a failed state. It was because of this conceptual shortcoming that the intervention of the international community focused on the consequences rather than on the real political crises that caused the catastrophic collapse of the state. For instance, although the international community modestly attended to the humanitarian exigencies of the situation, it hardly addressed seriously the underlying political problem concerning the disintegration of the institutions of the state in the country. A sensible approach would have been to attend first to the political problems in order to stabilise the political environment the country. Thus, in retrospect, the experience in Somalia challenges the conventional belief that humanitarian intervention without involvement in the domestic politics is the best appropriate response to a collapsed political system. According to Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, "Where people are dying in large numbers because of civilian conflict, the illusion should be discarded of a type of intervention that does not immediately interfere with the domestic politics of a country and does not include a nation-building component. Where famine is man-made, stopping the famine means rebuilding political institutions to create order" (Clarke and Herbst 1995:10).

Finally, even the modest success of the humanitarian intervention was not sustained because of the rampant violence and the chaos that the prevailing political crises in the country perpetuated. In short, the international community underestimated not only the profound political disaster in Somalia but also failed to formulate an appropriate resolution. This is an important lesson for future operations.

Third, the UN intervention in Somalia failed because the mission was perceived to be a quick fix and a rapid exit operation. And it was behind this premise that the international community hastily intervened in Somalia. The mission, however, because of its "quick fix" nature was poorly conceived, poorly planned and poorly executed. There was no clear political agenda to establish what the mission entails and the realistic means to achieve the goals. In other words, the details of the operation were not spelled out in advance. There was also no sufficient preparation for the intervention. Everything was hurriedly decided and put together. Furthermore, the mandate of the mission was vaguely formulated and was not even adhered to accordingly. Prior to the intervention, the situation on the ground was not thoroughly assessed and was not intelligently understood since the international community was absent from Somalia for a long period of time. More simplistically, the intervention in Somalia was thought to be an easy operation since the political problem there was perceived to be a marginal quarrel between rival warlords and ragtag militias. As a result, the whole policy of the intervention was dictated by short-term exigencies since what the international community wanted in Somalia was a quick fix, rapid exit and a declaration of success.

283 It is evident that both government and the state have collapsed in Somalia. Yet, most political actors both inside and outside the country act as if the regime is the only institution, which collapsed. They never question the total demise of the state. It is under this wrong assumption that they have been attempting to re-establish a government in Somalia since 1991. But so far this has failed to materialise because it is not possible to restore a government prior to a state" (Mohamoud, 2001:6). For more discussion, see Somalia: The Pitfalls of Drain of Human Resources (Mohamoud 2001).
A good example of a quick fix solution is how the international community approached the national political reconciliation. The UN administration attempted to resolve the political conflict in the country by focusing too much on quickly imposed outcomes and too little on the process. In fact, it was the disregard for the process - which painstakingly builds up towards a possible negotiated outcome that has made the resolution of Somalia’s conflict so problematic over the past 10 years.

Another example is how the international community put more emphasis on track I diplomacy and far less on track II diplomacy. Track I diplomacy is an official channel which the international diplomats formally use while dealing with politicians and governing authorities in any given country. By contrast, track II diplomacy is an informal channel where the local level civic groups and organisations are the major players. However, by focusing too much on track I diplomacy and a quick fix solution, the UN diplomats sought out the warlords who presided over the collapse of the state as interlocutors in the political reconciliation. This means that the UN diplomats dangerously promoted the political interests of the capricious warlords at the expense of informal civic groups. It may even be a truism to state that the international intervention in Somalia was flawed both in design and execution. Eventually, the short-term exigency that dictated the UN policy in Somalia became a disaster in itself since the complexity of the political crisis in the country was awesome and could not be fixed quickly. In fact, the dynamics of the political conflict in the country presented daunting challenges, which can only be tackled on a long-term basis. The lesson we can learn from this experience in Somalia is that quick fix intervention hardly solves anything. It can even be a recipe for failure as the diplomatic blunders in Somalia demonstrate.

Fourth, the UN intervention in Somalia failed because diplomacy was not seriously tried during attempts to resolve the political conflict in the country. For instance, before the intervention took place, half-hearted diplomacy was attempted to address the problem. But even this limited diplomatic effort, although undertaken too late, was not allowed to take its course. The international community was in a hurry and was not patient enough to wait for the ongoing “bottom up” diplomatic initiatives to materialise. As a result, diplomacy was abandoned immediately and instead a huge military intervention was launched to restore the political order in the country. Yet, the military option was not a sensible alternative. With a sensible policy and an appropriate strategy, the military intervention should have been a last resort. At the time of the intervention, the appalling human suffering that the fighting of the unscrupulous rival warlords had caused was a challenge to our collective conscience and that precipitated the military intervention. Thus, seen from this humanitarian angle, the military intervention was a necessity and understandable. But what was not understandable and was fundamentally wrong was when the intervention mission launched for humanitarian operation was altered to a military operation. A mission in which violence and frequent military


285 As Matt Bryden writes, “after so many setbacks, what the UN bureaucracy needs from Somalia is a quick fix that will allow a rapid exit and a declaration of victory. The UN wants only to stick the signatures of the Somalia’s warlords at the bottom of a tidy peace agreement, greased along with promises of fat bankrolls for reconstruction. That they are recreating the same corrupt donor-driven system that fuelled Somalia’s implosion in the first place is of a little concern to the international bureaucrats. Since this is the only solution the UN can come up with, it seems that Somalia’s misery is just beginning”, Africa Report, (May/June 1994): 23.

286 According to Alex de Waal and Rakiya Omaar, “military intervention does not solve diplomatic problems; it merely changes the diplomatic agenda” (de Waal and Omaar, 1994): 8.
engagements between the foreign forces and Somali militias prevailed. Eventually, the primacy of the military operation compromised the political impartiality of the UN administration, made it an actor in the conflict and finally derailed the original humanitarian purpose of the mission. The most sensible winning strategy of the UN administration in Somalia should have been diplomatically aggressive and militarily passive. In hindsight, the UN military intervention in Somalia aggravated the complexity of the political problems and prolonged the conflict. The lesson we can learn from the disaster of this military policy in Somalia is that diplomatic mediation must be given ample time and must be exhausted before military intervention is ever considered to resolve a domestic conflict for any future operation. This however depends on the effectiveness of the diplomatic mediation in helping to manage the conflict.

Fifth, the UN intervention in Somalia failed because it attempted to build the state from above. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, the international administration endeavoured to take the political role in the country that the fragmented Somali political elites failed to undertake. For instance, the Administration, particularly in its early stages took public responsibility for feeding the hungry Somalis (which saved thousands of lives), restored some public services, rehabilitated debilitated social infrastructures and attempted to establish a central authority. However, whatever public pursuit the international administration had tried to embark on, the warlords and the faction leaders systematically worked against it. And warlord Aideed was the most stubborn among them as he frustrated every initiative with regard to the wider public pursuit of the whole Somali nation that the UN administration undertook. Aideed even challenged the very presence of the international administration in the country, as he feared that their presence would hinder his scheme for private pursuit. Thus, the extremely fragmented political elites in Somalia were neither supportive nor interested in the public pursuit project that the UN administration undertook as this would compromise their private pursuit agenda.

In a nutshell, the failure of the UN intervention in Somalia was not only caused by the political and military blunders of the Administration but much more so by the private pursuit that the Somali political elites pursued as a zero-sum game. During the intervention, the most serious question that the international administration failed to ask is: how can a state be built from above when the domestic elites are in disarray and are immersed in the struggle for private pursuit? This is in fact the chief reason why we failed to reconstitute the state over the past ten years. It is also a critical factor, which is still making the restoration of the state very difficult.

Another daunting problem that the state collapse in Somalia raises is the challenge of transforming families and clan-families into a cohesive community. The making of a community of citizens is the prerequisite for the making of a viable state. A society divided into feuding lineages and clan-families like that of Somalia cannot form a viable state. More simply, a house divided cannot stand. Yet, the international community attempted to build a

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287 According to Dennis Dijkzeul, "Interventions aimed at fostering peace and rebuilding societies sometimes back-fired, and instead served to fuel and thus prolong conflicts, as was the case with Somalia". See further his article, "The Rise and Fall of Emergency Relief", Humanitarian Affairs Review (Autumn 2000): 26-31.

288 According to Robert G. Patman, "In the final analysis, however, while the UN 'humanitarian' intervention in Somalia was poorly conceived and mistake-ridden, it failed ultimately because of the truculent and myopic leadership of a dozen or so Somali warlords. Having started a civil war which ravaged the country and the lives of so many of its people, these power-hungry faction leaders spurned the opportunity to make peace under UN auspices" (Patman, 1995:104).
state in Somalia where there was neither a moral community – or, to put it simply, a community of collective concerns and belonging - nor a corporate political elite with a common and a well-defined national goal. In this respect, the effort of the international community can be described as putting the cart before the horse; or in other words, attempting to restore a state without a moral community. The building of a community and the state has always been the task of the domestic elites. Unfortunately, the domestic political elites in Somalia are preoccupied with the race for private pursuit. Only a cohesive political elite with a public pursuit agenda can engineer a community of citizens and build a viable state. Transforming clan-families and ethnic groups into a community of citizens and the building of a cohesive political elite will be the greatest challenges for the Somalis and for other Africans both in academia and those with political power for the foreseeable future. The construction of these underlying political cultures, without which a viable state cannot be build, must be the primary agenda for Africa in the twenty-first century.