

## PART II BACKGROUND TO THE SOMALI WAR

### 1 INTRODUCTION TO SOMALIA

#### 1.1 The Somali People

Somalia<sup>1</sup> covers almost 640,000 square kilometres in the north-eastern tip of the Horn of Africa. In the main this is a semi-desert region, with a vegetation cover and water resources that dictate a pastoral nomadic existence for the majority of the population. The exception is the area between the two southern rivers, the Shabelle and Juba, and in valleys of the northern escarpments, where higher rainfall and richer soils provide land suitable for agriculture.

The Somali-speaking people form one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, living dispersed throughout the Horn, from the Awash Valley, through the Ethiopian Ogaden, and into northern Kenya as far as the Tana river. A Cushitic-speaking family or 'nation' of people, Somalis belong to the Hamitic group of peoples, which includes the Afar, Oromo, Saho and Beja peoples of the Horn. The Somali are distinguished by a shared common ancestry, a single language, an Islamic (*sunni*) heritage and a way of life that is overwhelmingly pastoral.

The Somali are divided into six 'clan families' — **Dir, Issaq, Darod, Hawiye, Digil, and Rahanweyne** — which are further divided, according to agnatic descent, into subsidiary clans or lineage groups (see diagram 1) (Lewis, 1961). The Somali kinship system and the flexible and shifting alliances of clan kinship groups are fundamentally entrenched in the social, political, and economic culture of the Somali people.

Until the colonial period the Somali 'nation' did not form a single political unit; any concept of political identity was based on clan affiliation. It was only when the Ethiopian empire and the colonial powers of Britain, Italy, and France divided the Horn and the lands of the Somali peoples into five states — British Somaliland, Italian Somalia, French Somaliland (Djibouti), the Ethiopian Ogaden, and northern Kenya — and the Somali Republic was subsequently created that the concept of a Somali nation state began to grow. The international colonial borders that separate Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and northern Kenya make little reference to established territories of the Somali pastoral clans. Of particular importance are the **Haud** grazing reserves ceded to Ethiopia by Britain in 1954. Since independence, irredentist policies to reunite the 'lost' Somali territories have been one of the driving forces of Somali national politics.

#### 1.2 The Barre Regime

Created from the union of Italian Somalia and the British Somaliland Protectorate, the Somali Republic attained independence in July 1960. For its first nine years Somalia enjoyed a succession of democratically elected governments. In October 1969, amid accusations of corruption and electoral malpractice, the military seized power. Under the leadership of **General Mohamed Siad Barre**, 'Scientific Socialism' was adopted as the guiding ideology for the country's development.

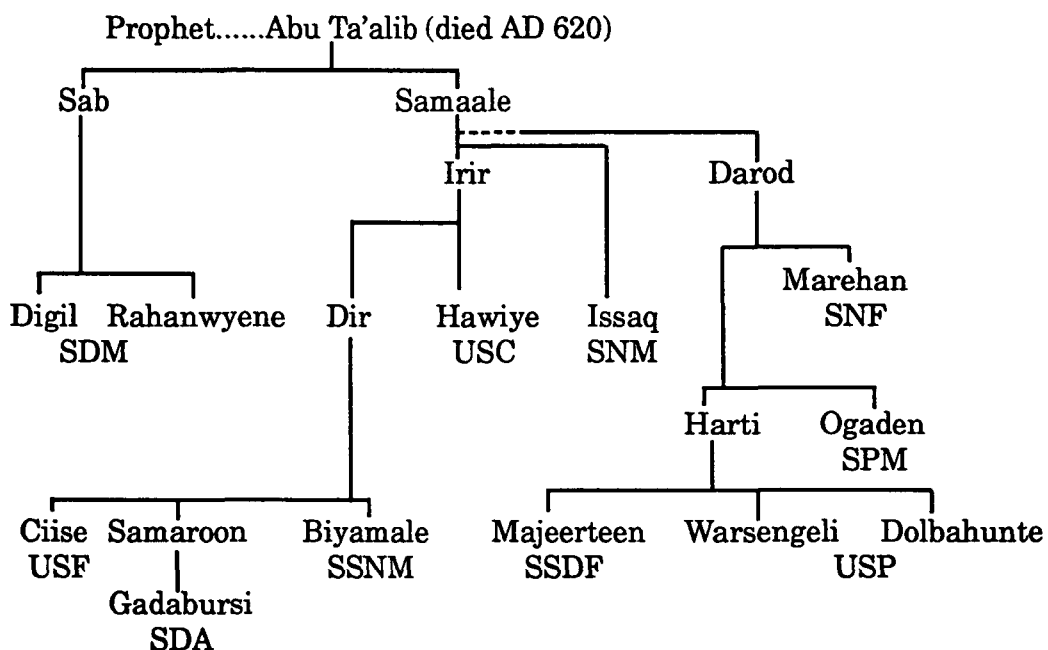
Under the banner of Scientific Socialism, Barre embarked on a radical programme to

fundamentally restructure Somali society. This programme initially received support from a class of urban intelligentsia and technocrats, grappling with the move from a pastoral society to a modern nation state, and disillusioned with the debilitating effects of 'clanism'. With a centrally planned programme, national development was promoted through an end to 'tribalism' and a commitment to 'popular participation', under the guidance of the single Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party. The masses were mobilised for crash development programmes, such as the 1973/4 literacy campaign; effigies of 'tribalism' were ceremonially burnt; marriages were celebrated at orientation centres and stripped of clan significance; clan elders were renamed 'peace-seekers' (*nabad-doons*) and made part of the state bureaucracy. This assault on the fabric of Somali society was coupled with state control of the economy. The intention was to turn this 'nation of nomads' into a modern state, in which people were required to look to the state for security and welfare, instead of the clan. Embodying the nation was the President and 'father of the nation', Siad Barre.

In 1974, Somalia suffered one of the worst droughts (*dabadheer*) in its history. In September of that year the regime of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia was overthrown. In 1977, taking advantage of the weakened Ethiopian state, Barre launched a war to reclaim the **Ogaden** for Somalia. The war, which met with almost universal support among the Somali people, was a high point of Somali nationalism and Barre's popularity. Defeat a year later by the Soviet-supported Ethiopian army of the new Ethiopian Marxist government caused fissures in Somalia, previously hidden by the war, to open.

In 1978 military officers of the **Majeerteen** (Darod) clan made an abortive attempt to overthrow the regime. Some officers who escaped arrest went on to form the **Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF)**, which launched a guerrilla campaign against the Barre regime in the central regions of Somalia. In 1981, disaffected **Issaq** of the northern regions formed the **Somali National Movement (SNM)** and took up arms against the regime. The end of the Ogaden war destroyed any sense of national unity. The fact that both the SSDF and the SNM sought sanctuary in Ethiopia was an indication of the disintegration within the Somali state.

Diagram 1: Somali Clans and Modern Politico-Military Movements



From that period power became more entrenched in the immediate family and clan of the President. Despite the elaborate structures of state that Barre introduced, and despite his anti-tribal rhetoric, Somalis regarded the regime as essentially clan-based, supported by those clans of his extended family commonly known as the 'MOD alliance': Marehan (father), Ogaden (mother), and Dolbahunte (son-in-law). By the late 1980s, even the MOD alliance began to break down, as the Marehan consolidated their positions in the face of growing insecurity.

Many Somalis point to the Ogaden war as the real starting point for the present Somali conflict. The 1988 peace accord between Somalia and Ethiopia brought an end to ten years of hostility between these countries. However, the accord also signalled a further demise in pan-Somali solidarity, as Ethiopian control over the Haud was finally recognised by Somalia. The accord precipitated an assault by the SNM on the northern cities of Burco and Hargeisa in May 1988, which provided the overt starting point of the present war.

### **1.3 The Militarisation of Somalia**

As Cold War politics in the region demanded, the Barre regime was initially supported by the Soviet Union and later, when the Soviets switched support to Ethiopia, by the USA. Siad Barre was particularly adept at using the tensions of the Cold War and super-power interests to solicit a vast array of armaments for his government. Between 1969 and 1977, with the support of the Soviets, Barre was able to build Africa's largest army. After 1977, when Barre turned for support to the USA, he was able to secure \$100 million a year in development and military aid, in return for US access to military facilities at Berbera port for its Rapid Deployment Force. In late 1987, at a time when Somalia was on the verge of signing a peace accord with Ethiopia, some 16 per cent of Somalia's imports were in the form of arms (*Third World Guide* 1991/2). In June 1988, a few weeks after the outbreak of war in northern Somalia, the USA delivered \$1.4 million in military aid to the Barre government.

The USA and the Soviet Union were not the only suppliers of military equipment to Somalia. At different times Italy, Romania, East Germany, Iraq, Iran, Libya, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and China have all contributed. The vast arsenals of weapons that the warlords have had at their disposal to fight the civil war have been the Cold War's main legacy to Somalia.

## **2 THE SOMALI CIVIL WAR**

Since the late 1970s Somalia, and those areas of the Horn inhabited by the Somali people, have been in a virtually continual state of conflict. The historical origins of the present civil war lie in the defeat of Somali army in the Ogaden war of 1977 and, with it, the end of pan-Somali unity. As the Somali war has become more protracted, that sense of unity has dissipated further and Somalia has become more fractured probably than at any other time in its history.

### **2.1 War with the Majeerteen**

The Majeerteen clan inhabit the north-eastern corner of the Somali peninsular, in Mudug, Nugaal, and Bari regions. Since the nineteenth century, they have also

formed a prominent business community in Kismayo, where they are known as **Harti** (the generic term for the Majeerteen, Dolbahunte, and Warsengeli).

Since the arrival of the European powers, the Majeerteen have always played a significant role in Somalia's politics. After independence Somalia's first two Prime Ministers were Majeerteen, as was the second president, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, who was assassinated in 1969.

In April 1978, following the defeat of Somalia in the Ogaden, Majeerteen colonels attempted to remove Barre in a coup. The coup failed, but those officers who escaped went on to form the SSDF, led by **Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf**. The SSDF launched military campaigns against the regime in the early 1980s in Mudug region, home of Abdillahi Yusuf's sub-clan. The response of the regime to the SSDF guerrilla campaigns was savage. In the months of May and June 1979, over 2,000 Majeerteen were said to have died in Mudug region at the hands of Barre's crack troops, the Red Berets (Samatar, 1991). The brutality of the campaign against the Majeerteen was a forerunner for an even more vicious campaign against the Issaq people.

The SSDF collapsed in 1986, when its leader Abdillahi Yusuf was arrested by the Ethiopians, who at the time were seeking rapprochement with Barre. It was reconstituted as a political party in 1989 in Rome. In 1989, as the civil war spread into the central regions, the north-east became cut off from the south. In 1990, several prominent Majeerteen joined the '**Manifesto Group**' of politicians, businessmen, and elders who sought the peaceful removal of Barre from power. However, the SSDF played little part in the military over-throw of Barre. Since the overthrow of Barre, the north-east has remained largely free from fighting, except for a short-lived conflict with the Al Itihad Islamia (Islamic militants) in June 1992. In contrast, the southern Harti have been involved in a fierce war, under the banner of the **SPM/SNF**, against the **USC/SNA**, for control of Kismayo.

Since 1991, the Chairman of the SSDF has been **General Mohamed Abshir**, former Chief of Police in the 1960s, with Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf resuming military command of the SSDF after he was released from Ethiopian jail with the fall of Mengistu.

## **2.2 War with the Issaq**

The Issaq, all located in the north-west of Somalia, made up the major section of the population of the former British Somaliland Protectorate.

Somaliland gained independence from Britain on 26 June 1960. Six days later it joined with Italian Somalia to form the Somali Republic. Although the Issaq lost their majority position in the new Republic, they continued to have influence in the government. Between 1967 and 1969 Somalia had an Issaq Prime Minister, **Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal**.

Part of the traditional grazing land of the Issaq lies in the Haud in Ethiopia. The decision to unite with the south was partly based on a belief that through unity there was a chance of reestablishing control over the Haud. The Issaq were therefore supportive of the war against Ethiopia to reclaim the Ogaden. The loss of that war resulted in a mass influx of **Ogadeni** (Darod) refugees into the north. The threat which this

posed to their own lands in the north, coupled with the dictatorial policies of Barre, led the alienated Issaqs to form the Somali National Movement (SNM), in London in 1981.

The SNM did not achieve widespread support until 1988. In May 1988, fearful of losing their bases in Ethiopia because of the peace accord, the SNM attacked government garrisons and briefly captured the northern cities of Burco and Hargeisa. In response to the SNM offensive, the Somali Armed Forces then proceeded to carry out a systematic assault on the Issaq population, forcing thousands of civilians, mainly women and children, to flee to Ethiopia. Some 50,000 people were estimated to have been killed between May 1988 and March 1989 (Africa Watch, 1990), and up to 600,000 fled to Ethiopia. These brutal attacks succeeded in uniting the Issaq behind the SNM.

The three years of warfare in the north were largely confined to the Issaq territories in the western regions of **Waqoyi Galbeed**, **Togdheer** and **Sanaag**. Areas inhabited by the **Gadabursi** (**Awdal**), **Dolbahunte** (**Sool**) and **Warsengeli** (**Badhan**) remained largely free from fighting, and today the towns of Boroma, Las Anod and Badhan remain relatively undamaged.

When Barre fled from Mogadishu, in January 1991, the SNM took over the territory of the former British Somaliland and assumed authority. In May 1991, having reached an accommodation with the non-Issaq clans in the north, the SNM declared the secession of the north-west region and reasserted their sovereignty as the independent **Republic of Somaliland**.

### **2.3 War with the Ogaden**

The Ogaden, a sub-lineage of the Darod, are the largest Somali clan confederacy, inhabiting the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, Somalia south of the Juba river, and north-east Kenya.

The Ogadenis did not play a prominent role in the independent civilian governments. The majority live in the Ethiopian Ogaden, and it is their location there, and the force of Somali irredentism, which has given them a particular role in Somalia's politics. The refugees who entered Somalia after the Ogaden war, by and large, provided Barre with a new, supportive constituency, which he later armed to fight the SNM.

In April 1989 Barre dismissed the powerful Ogadeni Minister of Defence, **Aden 'Gabiyo'**, thus sparking a mutiny among Ogadeni soldiers in the southern port of Kismayo. This led to the formation of a second armed opposition movement, the **Somali Patriotic Movement** (SPM), led by the brother-in-law of Gabiyo, **General Bashir 'Beliliqo'**. The sacking of Gabiyo arose out of Marehan fears of Ogadeni dominance in the army. However, the mutiny in Kismayo had its roots in a protracted conflict between the Marehan and Ogadeni pastoralists over the resources of the **Juba** region.

The creation of the Ogadeni opposition movement signalled the break-up of the Darod alliance of clans that had dominated the ruling group in Somalia for twenty years. A second Ogadeni front was formed in June 1989, when **Colonel Omar Jess** defected

with soldiers from the Somali army in Hargeisa. Since the overthrow of Barre, the SPM have divided into two factions, one led by Aden Gabiyo, and the second by Omar Jess.

## **2.4 War with the Hawiye**

The final downfall of Barre was precipitated by the emergence, in 1989, of a **Hawiye**-based military force, the **United Somali Congress (USC)**, in the central rangelands. As the largest clan in southern Somalia, stretching into Kenya and Ethiopia, their size, geographical spread, and economic strength within Mogadishu have made the Hawiye significant players in the country's politics. The first president of Somalia was Hawiye, and throughout the civilian 1960s they retained 20 per cent of cabinet posts. During Barre's regime, while their political power was limited, they were economically strong and benefited from the concentration of development programmes in the south. They were therefore not marginalised in the same way as the Issaq.

In October 1989 a section of Hawiye soldiers mutinied in Galkaiyo. Afterwards some 200 Hawiye civilians were reported killed. From that point fighting spread throughout the central regions of **Mudug, Galgaduud, Hiraan** and the towns of Dusamereb and Beletweyne. The USC was supported in its campaign by the SNM. Again the Somali army retaliated, with bombings of villages and massacres of civilians on a scale that matched those against the Issaq and Majeerteen.

The USC, founded in December 1989, was formed from the **Habr Gedir** sub-clan of the Hawiye, a number of whom were members of the SNM Central Committee. The first leader of the USC, Mohamed Wardhigly, who sought a peaceful solution to the conflict, died in June 1990 and was replaced by **General Mohamed Farah Aideed (Habr Gedir Saad)**, who favoured a military solution. By October 1990, having agreed a joint campaign with the SNM and SPM, the USC had reached the outskirts of Mogadishu.

## **2.5 The Digil and Rahanweyne**

The Digil and Rahanweyne, located between the Juba and Shabelle rivers, belong to the **Sab** branch of the Somali people. Although they share the language and religion of other Somalis, they are predominantly agriculturalists and, as such, are looked down on by the Somali pastoral clans.

Their inferior status and smaller numbers have prevented them from playing a major part in Somali national politics. In 1989, a Rahanweyne opposition movement was formed, the **Somali Democratic Movement (SDM)**, calling for the removal of Siad Barre. Their small size meant that they played only a limited role in the overthrow of Barre. After Barre fled, they were unable to withstand the rampaging bands of both Barre's and the USC fighters, and became the principal victims of the war and famine.

## **2.6 The Manifesto Group**

For a year after the outbreak of war, the capital, Mogadishu, distanced from the fighting in the north and south, remained relatively calm. However, disaffection with

the economic situation, the rising tide of displaced people in the capital, and the government's handling of the conflict burst into violent opposition to the regime in July 1989. Following the assassination of the Bishop of Mogadishu, and the subsequent arrest of several prominent religious leaders, some 450 people were killed during a day of riots, followed by mass arrests and executions of civilians.

The events of July signalled a turning point in the conflict. The ruthless way in which the government suppressed the riots shattered any loyalty to the regime. In May 1990, over 100 prominent Somali citizens, including the first civilian president of Somalia (**Aden Abdulle Osman**), a former police commander (**General Mohamed Abshir**), cabinet ministers, ambassadors, civil servants, religious leaders, elders and businessmen (including **Ali Mahadi Mohamed**), signed an open letter (**'Manifesto No 1'**) condemning the policies of the regime, and calling on the government to accept a process of discussion with opposition groups to bring about a lasting solution to the political turmoil. Forty-five of the signatories were arrested and put on trial for treason, but later released after a mass demonstration in Mogadishu.

## **2.7 The Fall of Siad Barre**

In December 1990 Italy and Egypt belatedly offered to sponsor a Peace Conference in Cairo. This was rejected by the SNM, SPM, and the USC, as the USC forces, under the command of General Mohamed Farah Aideed, were poised to infiltrate Mogadishu.

On 3 December fighting erupted in Mogadishu as armed Hawiye attacked the army garrison at Villa Baidoba and the President's residence at Villa Somalia. The battle for Mogadishu lasted almost two months, during which time attempts by the Italians, Egyptians and the Manifesto Group to broker a peaceful solution failed. On 4 and 5 January 1991, the UN and remaining foreign nationals were evacuated by helicopter from the city to the US aircraft-carrier *Guam*, which had been diverted from its duties in the Gulf War.

Barre fled from the city on 26 January, together with his son-in-law **General Said Hersi Morgan**, to his home area in Gedo region in the south-west of the country. In Gedo he reconstituted his army under the banner of the **Somali National Front (SNF)**, twice attempting to recapture Mogadishu. In April 1992 Siad Barre fled from Somalia to Kenya and eventually Nigeria.

## **2.8 War and Famine**

The fall of the Barre regime left a huge vacuum. Any control that the USC and SPM leaders exerted over the situation was quickly lost in the battle against Barre in Mogadishu. The hurried appointment of **Ali Mahadi Mohamed** as interim President and **Omar Arteh Ghalib** as Prime Minister by the Manifesto Group after Barre fled immediately precipitated a split among the loose alliance of opposition movements that had fought to overthrow Barre. Early attempts by the Italian government to reconcile the various factions showed some signs of promise at two conferences held in Djibouti in May and June 1991. However, without the agreement of General Aideed, Omar Jess, and the SNM, the recommendations of that conference proved impossible to implement.

After months of friction a second and more intensive battle between General Aideed and Ali Mahadi in Mogadishu began in November 1991. The fighting, which lasted four months, cost the lives of as many as 25,000 civilians. A cease-fire brokered by the United Nations, on 3 March 1992, coincided with a second attempt by Siad Barre to recapture Mogadishu. His forces, which came within 70 km of the capital, were repulsed by the USC, and the former President was forced to flee into permanent exile.

For some 16 months, from December 1991 to March 1992, the south suffered almost continual warfare. The coastal towns of Merca, Brava and Kismayo and the inland towns of Baidoba and Bardheere suffered waves of invasions by the undisciplined fighters of the USC, SPM, SNF, and others. Rape of women, particularly among the coastal Hamr and Bravani populations, mass executions, destruction of agricultural land, looting of grain stores and livestock, destruction of water supplies and homes led to the massive displacement of people into Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen, and mass starvation.

## **2.9 International Intervention**

Throughout this period a handful of aid agencies witnessing the vicious violence and impending starvation, notably ICRC, SCF, MSF and the International Medical Corps (IMC), called on the UN and international community for a large-scale infusion of food to subdue the fighting (Africa Watch, 1992).

In April 1992, after 18 months of inaction, the UN appointed a Special Envoy to Somalia, **Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun**, and mobilised a six-month Plan of Action to provide \$23 million in aid and the deployment of 550 military personnel as peace-keepers. The operation, known as **UNOSOM**, was enlarged to 3,500 peace-keepers in August, after the UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali accused the West of being more concerned with the 'rich man's war' in former Yugoslavia than with Somalia. In October 1992 another 100-Day Plan for Somalia, worth \$82.7 million in aid, was set back when public criticism of the UN operations in Somalia by Ambassador Sahnoun caused a dispute with the Secretary General, and Sahnoun was forced to resign.

By this time inter-clan warfare had declined and was replaced by the armed looting of food aid, thus exacerbating the deadly famine that, at its height, was killing 1,000 people every day in the south. The cost of armed protection for relief supplies was equivalent to the cost of the food delivered. The inability of the UN troops to control the ports and secure the aid supplies finally led the UN Security Council to endorse resolution 794 (1992), which authorised an offer by the outgoing US President Bush to deploy 30,000 US troops in Somalia. Code-named **Operation Restore Hope**, the limited objective of the US-led **United Nations International Task Force (UNITAF)** was to 'create a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian relief', throughout the country.

The intervention of the UNITAF was followed by two hastily arranged reconciliation conferences between the military factions, as a precursor to handing over to a UN multi-lateral military peace-enforcement administration. On 8 January 1993 in Addis Ababa, leaders of the politico-military movements, the 'warlords', agreed a cease-fire



and signed an agreement on modalities for disarmament. This was followed on 27 March 1993 by an agreement for National Reconciliation in Somalia. By this agreement the factions reaffirmed their commitment to the cease-fire and a process of disarmament, and agreed to the formation of national transitional political and administrative institutions that would lead to the formation of a new government within two years.

On 4 May 1993, UNITAF handed over to a UN international military and civilian operation known as UNOSOM II, authorised under UN Security Council resolution 814 (1993). A month later 24 Pakistani UN peace-keepers were killed in Mogadishu during a weapons search of the Aideed-controlled Radio Mogadishu. The deaths of UN peace-keepers ushered in a new cycle of violent conflict in Somalia in which, by mid-September 1993, over 56 UN soldiers and several hundred Somalis had been killed.

## **2.10 Impact of the War**

In 1992, at the height of the conflict and famine, the situation in Somalia was described as the worst humanitarian crisis faced by any people in the world. Certainly, four years of civil war and famine have been catastrophic. At the end of 1992, it was estimated that over 400,000 people had died and 1.5 million had fled from the country, seeking refuge abroad.

In the aftermath of Barre, Somalia has become divided into semi-autonomous regions, represented by clan-based military organisations and administrations. On 18 May 1991, the SNM declared the secession of the northern regions to form the independent 'Republic of Somaliland'. In the North East Region the SSDF established an administration for the regions of Mudug, Nugaal and Bari. In Mogadishu and the traditional Hawiye territories directly north and south of the capital, there were said to be some 30 military groups at the end of 1992 claiming control of different areas, as the USC had fractured along clan lines. Various areas of the densely populated and resource-rich Lower Shabelle and Juba regions have, at different times, come under the control of the USC, SPM, SNF, SDM and SSNM (**Southern Somali National Movement**).

The war has affected all parts of Somalia and Somaliland. Only the north-eastern regions of Mudug, Nugaal and Bari and Sool and Awdal regions of Somaliland have escaped the worst of the violence. However, these areas, like others, have been affected by the pressures of destitute and traumatised people displaced by the war. Whole communities have been uprooted. The majority of the non-ethnic Somali population has left the country. The war has resulted in the wholesale destruction of housing, urban industry, communications, social service infrastructure, and agricultural infrastructure. In Hargeisa alone 60,000 houses were destroyed. From Hargeisa and Galkaiyo to the Kenyan border all government and public buildings have been completely ransacked. The most resilient part of the economy and way of life has been the pastoral sector in the north-east and Somaliland.

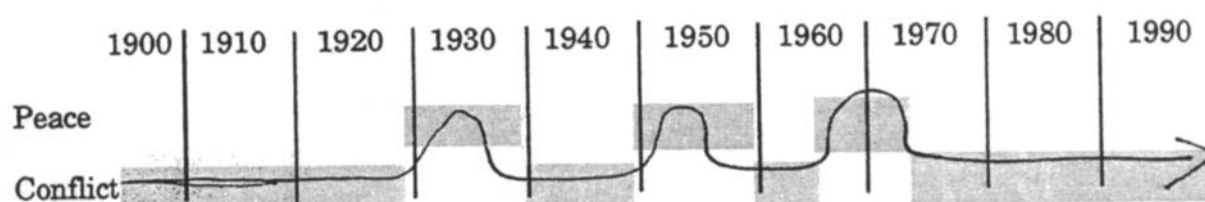
At the same time the focus of international attention on the war and famine in southern Somalia has hidden more positive developments elsewhere in the region. Except for a short-lived conflict between the SSDF and Islamic fundamentalists in

June 1992, and intermittent skirmishes along its southern border with the USC, the North East Region has, by and large, remained peaceful. In the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, the euphoria of independence was shattered by an outbreak of fighting in Berbera and Burco in early 1992. However, after some eight months of insecurity, a political settlement was brokered by the Somaliland elders. In May 1993, the Somaliland elders went on to conclude a national reconciliation conference at the town of Boroma, and the election, through peaceful means, of a new government for Somaliland.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE CONFLICT

Since the beginning of this century, there has hardly been a period when the Somali nation has not been in conflict with itself or with its neighbours. This was graphically expressed in the diagram below, produced at workshop on conflict and peace in Hargeisa in September 1993 (see Appendix D).

Diagram 2: Periods of Conflict and Peace in Recent Somali History



The cumulative effects of continual cycles of conflict on the development of Somalia and the lives of the Somali people must themselves be a cause of the recent conflict. While the May 1988 offensive by the SNM on government garrisons in northern Somalia stands out as the overt starting point for this conflict, the roots go much deeper.

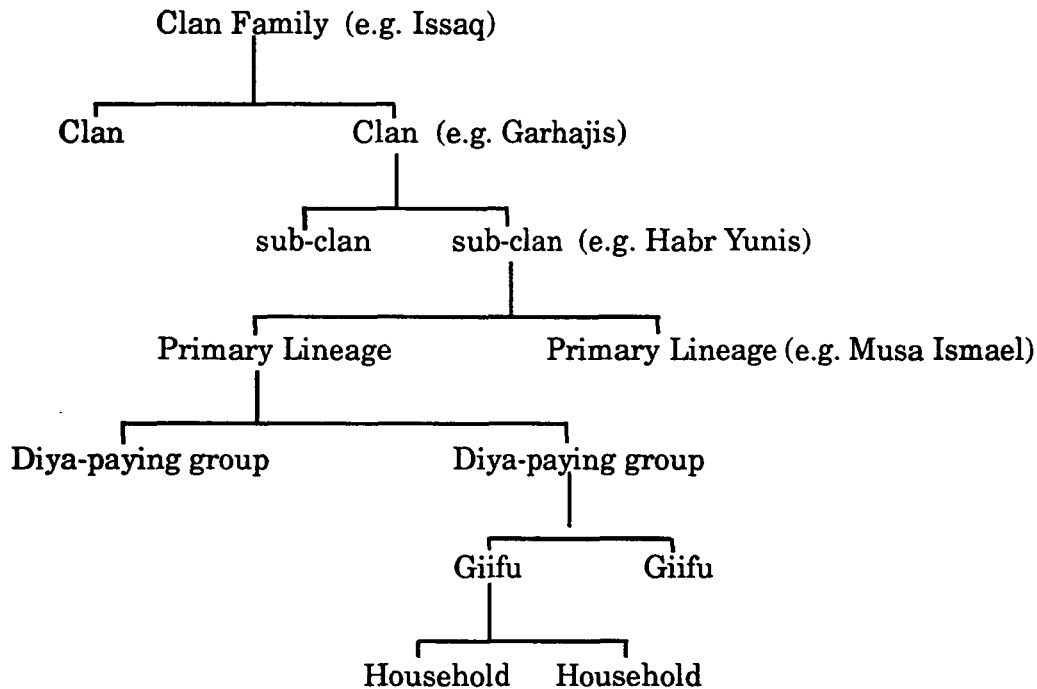
It used to be commented that Somalia was unique in Africa, being a state founded upon a single ethnic group — the Somali — who occupy a contiguous territory and share a common ancestry, a single language, an Islamic heritage, and a way of life that is overwhelmingly pastoral. It is therefore difficult to understand why an apparently homogeneous society should be wrecked by such internal conflict. Conflict between people of different cultures seems more understandable. Until the colonial period, however, the Somali people did not form a unitary state.

One of the main legacies of European colonialism was to graft a system of centralised governance on to the highly decentralised and egalitarian political system of a pastoral people. Subsequent civilian and military governments attempted to create a unitary Somali State, by turning corporate responsibility away from sectional kinship loyalties towards the State. The development of centralised government structures reached its peak in the repressive regime of Siad Barre.

It is important to understand that the political constitution of Somali society lies not in the centralised political institutions of a Western model, but in a particular social system of a pastoral people, where the notion of a 'social contract' has more to do with regulating political and economic relationships between pastoral kinship groups than with delegating responsibility to a central polity.

Somali society is structured on a segmentary clan lineage system, in which membership is determined by descent through the male line. The recognisable levels of segmentation among northern pastoralists are set out below. Within this kinship system, the smallest recognisable political and 'jural' units are the *diya*-paying groups, to which all Somali belong, and whose members are pledged to support each other, to pay and receive 'blood compensation' (*diya*) (Lewis, 1961).

**Diagram 3: The Somali Segmentary Lineage System**



The segmentary nature of this system reflects the need for pastoral groups, extracting a living from a harsh environment, to be in constant motion, expanding and contracting, in response to both internal (e.g. demographic) and external (e.g. ecological) forces of change.

It is a feature of this system that at any time one group may stand in opposition to another. The balance of opposing groups provides the 'fundamental source of order and security' (Cassanelli 1982) in Somali society. The effort to achieve this balance leads to the shifting political alliances that are a common feature of Somali politics. The system is dynamic and inherently unstable. When one group gains greater access to power or resources, or outside forces intervene, the balance breaks down and conflict emerges.

Since the creation of the Somali state and the introduction of centralised government, Somalia's politics has always been a balancing act involving the major clan families. It is true that the civil war in Somalia is the direct legacy of the concentration of power, the corruption, and the human rights violations of the Barre regime. But it has been fought along clan lines, and the 'anarchy' today must partly be understood

in terms of the segmentary nature of clans and their shifting alliances. The strength of Siad Barre lay in his ability to manipulate the delicately balanced clan system, supported by the means of state control. Individual access to such power goes against the grain of the Somali system of balanced groups; the imbalance needed redressing.

The civil war in Somalia has occurred at a time when the Horn in general is undergoing major social, political and economic transformations, which are directly related to global political changes, with the ending of the Cold War and the winding down of US and USSR interests in the region. The end of centralised government control, based on a single ideology, is challenging definitions of nationality, sovereignty, and the state throughout the Horn.

The most telling characteristic of the Somali conflict has been a process involving the reaffirmation of lineage identity and territoriality over national concerns. In this sense the war has been an 'ideological' struggle to overthrow a centralised government and to win greater participation, self-determination, and democracy after years of dictatorship and corrupt centralised government. The most dramatic example of this reassertion of self-determination was the declaration by the SNM, in May 1991, of the independence of the northern regions to form the 'Republic of Somaliland'.

People have also argued that an analysis of war based on clanism fails to address the external, economic, political and environmental forces that have played their part in this war. Such an analysis also, it is suggested, misrepresents the clan system as being wholly negative, and negates the more positive values of kinship.<sup>2</sup> Terms like 'anarchy' and 'madness' have been widely used to describe the state of disintegration that Somalia has arrived at today. They imply that there has been a complete breakdown of law and order and an absence of any sense of the 'social contract' that is required for civil order to exist. But this suggests a lack of understanding of Somali society.

Given the potential for dynamic and turbulent change inherent in the Somali kinship system, it not surprising that mechanisms should exist to mitigate tendencies to conflict. After all, mechanisms for resolving, managing, or mitigating conflict exist in all societies. In Somali society, one of the most important of these is *xeer*. This has been described as a 'contract' between lineage groups, combining both Islamic *sharia* and customary law. It defines the obligations, rights, and collective responsibilities of the group. Within the terms of this 'contract', members of a group are pledged to support each other. The *xeer* lays down the rules of corporate responsibility, and is a source of protection for both individual and group rights.

The *xeer*, however, is more than a contract. It defines the basic values, laws, and rules of behaviour. It is the closest equivalent to the notion of a 'social contract'. For those interested in peace-making and the reconstruction of Somali civil society, a fundamental question is the extent to which these values, as expressed in the *xeer*, have been lost during 21 years of military rule and four years of civil war.

Despite the assaults on the fabric of society, Barre's policies ultimately have not managed to eliminate the 'traditional' or historical value systems. In Somali society, history is extremely important. This is evident in the recitation of clan genealogies, the precedents that define customary law (*xeer*), religious knowledge and so on. Much of Somali political debate today is filled with historical references. This finds

expression in debates (and conflicts) over the ownership of resources in places like Kismayo, the reclamation of Somaliland sovereignty, the return to fundamental ('pure') Islam, the re-emergence of the authority of the elders, the formation of local councils such as the 'Khussusi' in Las Anod, and even the reappearance of historical figures on the political scene. There is a strong sense of people looking back to their culture, their religion and their politics, to explain why Somalia has reached the state it has today, and to find something to help them for the future. This is not regressive behaviour. It is a belief among many Somalis that future peace and stability cannot grow until people rebuild their relations of trust and cooperation from the grassroots upwards. It is to this end that people in Somaliland have looked to the reinvestiture of the traditional means of authority and leadership to rebuild society.

The Somali conflict is the result of a mixture of factors that include the legacies of European colonialism, a schismatic kinship system, the contradictions between a centralised state and a pastoral culture, east-west Cold War politics and militarisation, underdevelopment and uneven development, ecological degradation, and the lack of power-sharing, corruption, and human rights violations. Our understanding of the role that each of these have played in the war is limited and needs to be improved upon. What can be said, however, is that while climate has had its part to play, this is very much a man-made disaster, played out over four years of armed conflict. The phrase 'man-made' is used deliberately, because in this war women have been the innocent victims, if not targets, of the violence. 'Man-made' implies also that it should be resolvable.

Peace-making needs to be supported with an understanding of the causes of a conflict, and the causes of the Somali conflict are open to many different interpretations. An understanding, however, that the Somali conflict is 'created by people and can be eliminated by human action'<sup>3</sup> must be the starting point for any discussion of peace-making.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**Long term support:** If agencies are to become involved in peace-making in Somalia or Somaliland, they will need to make a long-term commitment of people and resources. They need to think in terms of a ten-year perspective and probably not expect to see substantial results from their efforts in anything less than two years.

**Research:** An understanding of both the causes and impact of the Somali conflict and the responses and solutions to it is a pre-requisite for any involvement in peace-making. Agencies should consider sponsoring research in a number of different areas that will provide a dynamic analysis of the current situation in Somalia and Somaliland. The emphasis should be on commissioning Somali researchers. Agencies might consider commissioning research for a series of short briefing papers for publication. Areas for research might include:

- **History:** a historical perspective on Somalia and the creation of the Somali state, and implications of developing new models of government.

- **Anthropology/sociology:** an anthropological/sociological understanding of Somali society, its use and limitations for understanding the present conflict.
- **Politics:** an understanding of international and internal political forces in Somalia, including Cold War and post-Cold War politics, the Somali political factions and actors in Somalia, the role of African, regional politics, and UN and US policy in Somalia.
- **Economics:** an understanding of Somalia's past and present economy, resources, trade, debt, aid, and under-development.
- **Militarism:** the effect of militarism, the arms trade, NGOs and arms, mines, and demobilisation.
- **Environment:** the role which environmental factors have played in the conflict (the 'greenwar' analysis), the effect of diminishing environmental resources on modes of production, the management, control and access to land, and the impact of the war on environmental resources.
- **Social impact of the war:** at both local and national levels, the social impact of the war — population movements, refugees, inter- and intra-group relationships, trauma, social dislocation. This should incorporate a gender-based analysis.
- **Peace-making/conflict-resolution:** There is a need to identify and understand indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution and ways in which these may be strengthened. This should also include an understanding of indigenous coping and healing practices. An understanding of the role that women are playing in the peace processes in Somalia is needed.
- **Relief and rehabilitation:** An understanding of the role that international humanitarian assistance played in resolving or sustaining the conflict would be useful to determine the future roles and policies for international NGOs in Somalia, Somaliland and elsewhere. Areas to consider might be food and health policies, NGO working practices and organisational structures, security, recruitment, and Somali NGOs.