



FACTORS OF STATE FAILURE IN SOMALIA:

1991-2007

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors of state failure in Somalia between 1991-2007. The main question probed in this study is what were the factors that led to the failure of the Somali State? The study hypothesizes that state failure in Somalia is strongly associated with the interplay of the internal structural factors of nation building, political organisation, and governance and external geopolitics of power and regional rivalries. The internal factors included leadership failure which personalized the state resources and power, the militarisation of the state, warlordism and civil war. The internal failure was exacerbated by economic failure and corruption which ended in the looting of the state resources. The external factors included Somali superpowers game and the regional intervention from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Kenya which supported different Somali actors to achieve their own interests. The war on terror and piracy activity made the Somali State vulnerable to more intervention, and divisions among the Somalis. The root problem of the failure of the Somali State was the colonial rule which divided the Somali people into different states. When it became independent, Somalia's main agenda was the reunification of the Somali people into the Greater Somalia. The study recommends that the Somali reconciliation should be inclusive of all internal actors, and supported by international players.

ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أسباب فشل دولة الصومال ما بين عام 1991-2007م. تفرض هذه الدراسة أن أسباب الفشل تعود إلى تقسيم الصومال إلى خمس مستعمرات، وأسباب داخلية، وخارجية. ومن الأسباب الداخلية: فشل القيادة السياسية، والقبلية، والفشل الاقتصادي والإداري. أعطت القيادة الصومالية منذ الاستقلال الأولوية لأجندتها الخاصة بها، وليس وفقا للأجندة الوطنية، حيث أصبحت المحسوبة والاستبداد أمرين سائدين في سياسة الصومال، فضلا عن الفشل الاقتصادي والإداري، وعدم الثقة، وعسكرة القبائل، وإسكات الرأي الآخر. كل ذلك أدى في النهاية إلى تناحر الجميع على السلطة والثروة، والعمل على انهيار الدولة الصومالية. أما الأسباب الخارجية فتمتد من أيام الاستعمار إلى مدة الحرب الباردة، وأدى التدخل الاقليمي في السياسة الصومالية والدعم الذي توفره إثيوبيا وأريتريا وكينيا لبعض القوي إلى اشتعال الحرب الأهلية وتواصلها. ومن ضمن العوامل الخارجية التي أسهمت في ديمومة الفشل الصومالي الحرب على ما يسمى الإرهاب، والذي انطلق من المصالح الأمريكية، دون أن يأخذ بعين الاعتبار ميزان القوى في الصومال، حيث استبعد بعض الأطراف التي يمكن بمشاركتها تكوين دولة صومالية فاعلة. توصلت الدراسة إلى أهمية إيجاد حلول محلية للمشكلة الصومالية، والاعتماد على واقع القوى فيها، وأنه من المهم إشراك الأطراف الخارجية في مساعدة الصومال في إيجاد الحل للمشكلة الصومالية، وليس فرض أجندتها الخاصة.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences (Political Science).

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Human Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Abdurahman Mohamed Hussein

Signature.....

Date.....

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FACTORS OF STATE FAILURE IN SOMALIA:

1991-2007

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I dedicate my thesis to all Somali people who have suffered from the failure of their state, for those who died, injured, became refugee, and for those who still are suffering from the failure.

I also would like to dedicate the work to my parents Shiekh Mohamed and Barni, my wife Farhiya, my son Mohamed and my daughter Yasmin.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIAI	Al-Ittihad Al-Islami
AMISOM	African Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
SYL	Somali Youth League
SSRC	Somali Supreme Revolutionary Council
TFG	Transitional Federal Government (2004 to present)
TNG	Transitional National Government (2000-2004)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNISOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia

CHAPTER ONE

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

In 1991, Somalia ceased to exist as a state in the modern sense of the term. It lost all functions and mechanisms for social control and political administration. The central government of Somalia collapsed after several clan-based armed groups violently unseated the long reigning military leader General Mohamed Siyad Barre. The consequences of these events have resulted in the total disintegration of Somalia into clan-based fiefdoms controlled by warlords and their militias, which then led to total social disarray. As a result of that the cohesion and collective consciousness of the Somali nation was fragmented into smaller units.

After two decades of turmoil and political stalemate, the Somali issue remains unresolved. At present, Somalia has no effective central government, national army and police force, court system or institutions of public service. Subsequently Somalia has become what is known as a “failed state”, i.e. (without central authority and therefore lacks control over the means of violence and external intervention). Therefore, the most dramatic and unique aspect of the Somali crisis lies in the complete collapse of the central government.

Since then, efforts to re-establish a central government have been attempted many times but all failed to succeed. More than a dozen national peace conferences sponsored by the United Nations, Arab League, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti ended in failure. With the collapse of the state, the Somali people have since been suffering the horrible brutality of living in a Hobbesian world without law and order or viable

institutions to regulate relations among groups, most especially to protect the most vulnerable population from the effects of the Civil War.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Failed states create broad security threats to state, regional and international levels. This phenomenon has attracted the attention of the scholars and academicians to understand the reasons behind state failure. This study is part of that effort; it specifically aims at analysing the factors responsible for the failure of the Somali State during 1991-2007. In line with the foregoing, the thesis tends to answer the following questions:

- 1) What characterises state failure?
- 2) What are the factors that explain state failure?
- 3) What factors are responsible for the failure of the Somali State?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are to:

- 1) Examine state failure,
- 2) Analyse factors of state failure,
- 3) Discuss factors of the failure of the Somali state,
- 4) Examine the complex nature of Somali politics.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As the statement of the problem and its accompanying research question suggest, this study will identify and discuss the internal & external factors responsible for the failure of the Somali state and provide more insights into the crisis. Furthermore, the

researcher's Somali background will offer a different in-depth modern view after compared to most existing studies on the Somali crisis advanced by foreign scholars with little knowledge of the internal dynamics of the Somali society.

In addition to the above, the study will also provide a substantial contribution to the existing literature on the Somali crisis, the failure of the Somali state and general studies on state failure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining state collapse is not an easy task because the collapse of a state system cannot easily be reducible to symptoms or even immediate causes alone; rather, one may have to posit deeper conceptions to fully understand the situation. The growing interest in state failure is no coincidence; this is because the number of new emerging states has grown dramatically in the first half of the twentieth century from fifty five recognised nations to nearly two hundred, and this has led to emergence of a non sustainable states. ¹

The issue of state failure has gained attention from scholars, especially after the Cold War. According to the Index of Failed States sponsored by the Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy* magazine, many African states considered to be failed or failing states. According to the Index, seven out of the ten most failed states were from Africa between the years 2005 until 2010, for the third year Somalia ranks Number 1. ²

¹ Robert I. Rotberg, (eds), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*. (Washington DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2003), 2.

² James, Traub, In The Beginning "There Was Somalia", *Foreign Policy*, no, 89, retrieved July 12, 2010, from (Proquest Social Science Journals 2010, document ID: 2072857971), 80-84 Fund for Peace, < <http://www.fundforpeace.org>>, (accessed on April 2010).

These studies focus mainly on the causes of state failure in Africa, the two major causes cited in the studies are, (1) lack of political experience, and (2) a colonial legacy that still affects the continent.

Theoretically the scholars have adopted different approaches in analysing the issue of state failure. Some focus on the definition of the state failure explaining what it means to be a failed state, and also categorise states either a strong, weak, failed or collapsed ones. Others focus on the causes behind the state failure; they examine why some states fail while some do not, and explains the reasons behind the failure. The third group focuses on regional and state level failure, such as state failure in Africa, or in a particular country like Somalia. The discussion below sheds light on the highlighted classification of literature on state failure.

Literature review is divided into three sections: 1) literature on state failure, 2) literature on causes of state failure, and 3) literature on state failure in Somalia.

Literature on State Failure

Jean-Germain defines a state “as a territorial entity ruled by an authority that has a monopoly over the legitimate means of violence and that is recognised by the members of the polity and the larger international community”³. From above definition failed states are those in which public authorities are either unable or unwilling to fulfil their part of the social contract.

Nevertheless, Stefan Mair posits that there is a disagreement among those who focus on the definition of what actually constitutes a failed state. The first point of disagreement lies in the problem of identifying the indispensable function of a state.

³ Jean-Germain Gros, “Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order: Decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti” *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 17, issue, 3 (1996): 455-472.

Most would agree that a state must be able to exert monopoly on the use of force within its borders, provide a legitimate political and legal order, and offer essential services in health education and physical infrastructure. The second disagreement lies in the controversy over the degree of failure in the key function that qualifies a state as a failed one.⁴

The concept of failed states first emerged in the literature by Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner in an article published in *Foreign Policy* in 1993. The authors do not present a comprehensive definition of the concept and a succinct definition of the concept of failed state is still elusive. According to them a “failed nation-state” is “utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community” and “depending on foreign assistance”⁵. But what is not clear here is what the authors conceive as being a member in the international community. If they meant being a member in the UN and the other international organizations as their conception of failed state then there will be confusion in the Somali case, because Somalia is a member of all of these organizations.

In the case of Esty, he defines the failed state as the one in which the “institutions of the central state are so weak that they can no longer maintain authority or political order beyond the capital city and sometimes not even there”.⁶ Zartman argues that state collapse is a deeper phenomenon than mere rebellion, coup or riot. It refers to a situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new. Zartman argues that failed states are states that can no longer perform the function required

⁴ Stefan Mair, “A New Approach: The Need to Focus on Failing States” *Harvard International Review*, vol. 29, issue, 4 (2008): 52-55.

⁵ Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, “Saving Failed States”, *Foreign Policy*, no, 89(winter 1992-1993): 3-20.

⁶ D. Esty, et al, *Failed States and International Security: Causes, Prospects, and Consequences*, (W. Lafayette, IN: Purdue University, 2000), 7.

from them as a state, the central government is paralyzed and inoperative, laws are not made, order is not preserved, and societal cohesion is not enhanced.⁷

According to Rotberg, “states fail when they are consumed by internal violence and cease delivering positive political goods to their inhabitants”. State will fail if it fails to perform what is required of a nation state; nation state exists to provide a decentralized method of delivering political (public goods) to persons living within designated parameters. And in addition to defining what a failed state, Rotberg classifies such states as strong, weak and failed/collapsed states.

Rotberg suggests that it is according to their performance and to the levels of their effective delivery of the most crucial goods- the strong states may be distinguished from the weak state, and the weak from the failed and collapsed. Strong states unquestionably control their territories and deliver a full range of political goods to their citizens. Weak states are inherently weak because of geographical, physical or fundamental economic constraints, or they may be basically strong, temporarily or situationally weak. Failed states are tense and deeply conflicted, dangerous and contested bitterly by warring functions⁸, and they even cannot control their borders. In most of the failed states, regimes prey on their own constituencies. A collapsed state is a rare and extreme version of a failed state. It is a more serious face of state failure where there is no central government and authority. Political goods are obtained through ad-hoc means. Security is equated with the rule of the strong.⁹

Malek clarifies one important aspect in his categorization of state failure. To understand a state as a failed one or not, it requires an examination of the three factors

⁷ I William Zartman (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 5.

⁸ Robert I. Rotberg, “The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States Breakdown, Prevention and Repair” in *When States Fail Causes and Consequences*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1,4.

⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

that contribute to state failure. (1) State monopoly on the use of force; failed state loses the monopoly over the means of coercion. (2) Sovereignty. The taking of parts of the sovereign power by self entitled social authorities or nongovernmental groups without it being intended or regulated by the state concerned is a distinct feature of state decay, and (3) also the legitimacy of state and citizens' loyalty to it; all these factors should be taken into consideration.¹⁰

Robert Droff argues that “the essential characteristics of the failed or failing state seem clear and consistent; the state loses the ability to perform the basic functions of governance, and it loses legitimacy/inability of political institutions to meet the basic functions of legitimate governance is also accompanied by economic collapse/economic collapse is almost everywhere present in case of state failure”.¹¹

However, Hehir argues that everything related to the monopoly of power is one possible dimension of state failure. In addition to “coercive incapacity”, failed states suffer from “administrative incapacity” which involves a failure to provide the basic services that most citizens expect from modern governments, such as a minimal level of personal security, economic stability, and functioning bureaucratic and judicial institutions.¹²

State Failure Task Force has defined state failure as one that is “utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community”.¹³ The task force attributes state failures to conditions such as civil strife, government breakdown and economic degradation. Narrowly defined state failure consists of

¹⁰ Martin Malek, “State Failure in the South Caucasus: Proposals for Analytical Framework” *Transition Studies Review*, Vol. 13, no 2 (2006): 5,-6.

¹¹ Rober H Droff. “Responding to the Failed States: the Need for Strategy” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 10, issue, 3 (1999): 62-81

¹² Aidan, Hehir, “The Myth of the Failed States and the War on Terror: a Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom” *Journal of intervention and state building*, Vol. 1, issue 3 (2007): 307-332.

¹³ State failure political instability task force: internal wars and failure of governance 1955-2008. <http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/>.

instances in which central state authority collapses for several years, as a result of four types of events: revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse or disruptive regime transitions and genocides.¹⁴ A tension exists between the institutional and functional understanding of state failure state institutions can persist even while the state fails to fulfil what we understand as its key attributes.

For Milliken the important issue is the role that war-making (in the sense of the role of institutions of organized violence in state formation rather than actual fighting of wars) can play in the process of state collapse such as the government using the instrument of organized violence in the absence of institutional counterweights.¹⁵

Ndikumana explains that state failure is understood as a situation where the institutions of the state perform their functions poorly. Poor performance is the outcome of both indigenous disintegration of the institutions, as well as the pressure arising from purely exogenous factors which are outside of the control of state leadership. This failure will be in all fields including failure to provide law and order, and to administer justice for all the citizens.¹⁶

According to Bates, failure refers to the impulsion of the state, by which refers to two things. The first is the transformation of the state into an instrument of predation. As states fail, politicians employ political power to levy resources from those who lack it, rather than deploying the power of the state to enhance security, those in power use the state to promote their own interests, rendering others insecure. The abuse of power is the sole distinctive characteristic of state failure. The second

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause, "State Failure, State Collapse and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies", in *State Failure, Collapse and Reconstruction*, edited by Jennifer Milliken, (Blackwell publishing Ltd 2003), 7.

¹⁶ Leonce Ndikumana, "Making State Relevant in Burundi", in *Beyond State Failure and Collapse: Making the State Relevant in Africa*, edited by George Klay Kieh JR, (Lexington books, 2007), 52.

key character is the loss of the monopoly over the means of coercion. When states fail, political competition takes place between groups bearing arms; political parties become political militias as elites transform them into military band.¹⁷ This analysis is very important because most of the literature argue and focus on the loss of monopoly over the means of coercion, but Bates explains another important factor which is the abuse of power by the incumbents of the state authority.

These attempts to conceptualise and define state failure show the multiple contributing factors to state failure in terms of governmental collapse, economic devastation, and societal fragmentation.

Literature on Causes of State Failure

Rotberg explains that state failure is largely man made and non accidental. Institutional fragilities and structural flaws contribute to failure, but those deficiencies usually hark back to decisions or actions of men. Thus, it is leadership errors and personal motivations across history that has destroyed states up until the present day, leadership errors continue to erode fragile polities in Africa and Asia that already operate on the verge of failure.¹⁸

In this section, the literature review mainly focuses on the internal and external factors that contribute to state failure. According to Gros, five internal and external factors appear to correlate strongly with the implosion of states. They are given as economic mal-performance, lack of social synergy, authoritarianism, militarism and

¹⁷ Robert H. Bates, "State Failure". *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 11 (2008): 1-12.

¹⁸ Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak State: Causes and Indicators" in *International Politics Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, editor by Robert J Art& Robert Jeruis, (Pearson. Longman), 458.

environmental degradation, caused by rampant population growth.¹⁹ The causes of state failure are extremely diverse. Every state has its own complex history of external and internal influences and any attempt at conceptual generalisation will necessarily omit particular factors that are relevant and important to the individual case. In the past, most states failed because they were conquered by their neighbours. In the present age, most do so because they should never have been created in the first place.²⁰

There is a focus on the issue of resources in underdeveloped economic settings and its role in state failure. There are two main approaches, the first emphasises the roles resource scarcity and environmental degradation play at the onset of political violence and violent political challenges to state authority in particular. The other focuses on the role resource abundance plays in affecting similar processes. Homer-Dixon argues that, environmental scarcity can contribute to diffuse persistent sub-national violence such as ethnic clashes and insurgencies. He explains that land is valuable because of scarcity, and scarcity brings over-use and land degradation, which in turn fuels poverty and rebellion.²¹ Fairhead says, conflict may not be over resources per se, but may equally concern struggle over means to exploit resources through labour force exploitation, control over the means of production and markets.²²

Chowdhury argues that the reasons of state failure are multidimensional, and occurs at the micro - meso - macro levels. He explains how state failure occurs at these different levels. Explanations at the micro level focuses on three domestic level

¹⁹ Jean-Germain Gros. "Towards a Taxonomy of Failed States in the New World Order: Decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti", 461

²⁰ The Stanley Foundation, *Failing States and US Strategy*. <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/resources.cfm?id=55> (accessed May,2010)

²¹ Homer-Dixon T. F, *Environment, Scarcity and Violence*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999), 43.

²² Fairhead James, "The Conflict Over Natural and Environmental Resources", in War, Hunger and displacement, edited by Nafziger, E. W, F. Stewart and R Varynen, (OUP: Oxford, 2000.), 122.

variables, the quality of leadership, lower bases of taxation, and availability of lootable resources. Scholars have argued that the corruption and inefficiency of leaders has over time diminished state power as public resources are used for private gain and a large number of subjects are marginalized. Explanations at the meso level attribute state failure to the nature of the war by the weak state against the strong state.²³ Finally, at the macro level failure of state is attributed to the effects of colonialism in two ways. First, post-colonial states were in many crucial ways an extension of the colonial regimes and this significantly eroded their legitimacy. Secondly, post-colonial states emerged as independent actors without the necessary state capacity to engage in conflict and emulate the European states. During the struggle for independence, the elites promised their public that they would at the very least not repeat the colonial order and sought instead to find a different order. It's the gap between the promise of anti-colonial nationalism and the inability to replace the colonial order that led to the problem of weak states.²⁴

The failure of a state can hardly occur spontaneously, or at once. If and when it happens, it is likely to have been preceded and initiated by complex and conflict-ridden process of deterioration, decline and erosion of state function. Actual failure is likely to constitute the final moment of such process and occur when certain point of no return has been passed.

Zartman provides the indicators that can be used as a measurement for state failure, which signal the future collapse. They are (1) fighting in the center leads to loss of control over the periphery where local authority is taken by local power mongers; (2) a government's loss of authority due to the neglect of general societal

²³ Arjun Chowdhury, "Expectations of Order: State Failure in Historical Context" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2009), 24, 25.

²⁴ Ibid, 28.

support; (3) the avoidance of critical decision leading to loss of coherence in the policy making of governmental institutions; (4) the practice of defensive politics resulting in fighting off challengers but avoiding actual proactive governance; and (5) the center's loss of control over peripheral state agents who then begin to rule by themselves.²⁵

However, Ndikumana says that state collapse often follows episodes of protracted conflict that undermine the foundations of state institutions. There are many ways of operationalising the process of state collapse by using the process stages that collapse come through. He argues that the first stage corresponds to the fictionalisation drive and communal mobilisation; stage two consists of an erosion of the notion of the state and a crisis of legitimacy; and the last stage will be institutional paralysis of the state and assault on state authority. These three stages are demarcated by three consecutive thresholds; wide spread negation of political loyalty to the state; complete erosion of state legitimacy; and total disintegration of state authority.²⁶

Doornbos argues that when a state is failing, a number of distinct patterns begin to appear as follow, failure will be occurring in a state in which privatisation of state assets and prerogatives of state rulers have become extreme, in which deepening challenges to that rule from former associates as well as from liberation movements. It will also occur in states where there is a historical mismatch between the nature and orientation of state institutions and the social-political process and divisions within the society concerned. The failure further happens when there are deepening conflicts over the control of strategic resources such as diamonds,-oil, etc, involving rebel groups and privatized armies, making institutions irrelevant. States also fail when

²⁵ Zartman, *Collapsed States: the Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, 7.

²⁶ Leonce Ndikumana. "Making State Relevant in Burundi", 54.