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# **Before Things Fall Apart: The Role of the Soviet Union in Somalia's Troubled Past (1969-1978)**

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**Abstract:** The narrative of Somalia as ‘a nation without a state’ has been central to analyses seeking to explain state failure, the absence of Weberian political authority, civil war, and the resurgence of radical Islamisation and terrorist networks. While the popular depiction on the causes of state collapse has focused on either external or internal factors, this article shows that the socio-political construction of post-independent Somalia has been more contested than frequently depicted, even before the foreign intervention. It argues that foreign intervention exacerbated the existing inability of the government to build standard state building institutions, and created further difficulties in forging nation-building. By revisiting the immediate post-colonial period of Somalia under the Soviet Union’s influence (1969-1978), the aim of this article is not to suggest that we should neglect the internal factors for Somalia’s troubled past, but to highlight the destructive consequences of foreign interventions (as an external factor) on post-colonial state-building. It provides further incentives for internal factors to become more pervasive in challenging contemporary international attempts to restore political order in Somalia.

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**Keywords:** Somalia, Soviet Union, internal factors, Cold War, state-building

**Abstrak:** Naratif Somalia sebagai ‘sebuah negara tanpa negari’ telah menjadi tumpuan analisis-analisis bagi menjelaskan kegagalan negeri tersebut, ketiadaan pihak berkuasa politik Weberian, perang saudara, kebangkitan Islamisasi radikal, dan rangkaian pengganas. Gambaran popular terhadap penyebab keruntuhan negeri tersebut telah memfokuskan terhadap faktor-faktor luaran mahupun dalaman. Oleh itu, artikel ini menunjukkan bahawa pembentukan socio-politik selepas kemerdekaan Somalia telah dibincangkan lebih daripada biasa, mahupun sebelum campur tangan asing. Ia membincangkan bahawa campur tangan asing telah memburukkan lagi keadaan ketidakupayaan kerajaan tersebut untuk membina institusi pembangunan negeri yang standard, seterusnya mencipta lagi kesukaran bagi memupuk pembangunan negara. Dengan mengkaji semula tempoh selepas penjajahan Somalia di bawah pengaruh Soviet Union (1969-1978), artikel ini bukanlah bertujuan untuk mencadangkan supaya kita patut mengabaikan faktor-faktor dalaman semasa Somalia menghadapi masa lalu yang bermasalah, sebaliknya ia adalah bertujuan untuk menonjolkan kesan-kesan pemusnahan campur tangan asing (sebagai faktor luaran) terhadap pembangunan negara tersebut selepas penjajahan. Ia memberikan insentif terhadap faktor-faktor dalaman yang membuatnya lebih ketara dalam menangani percubaan antarabangsa kontemporari untuk memulihkan semula keadaan politik di Somalia.

**Kata kunci:** Somalia, Kesatuan Soviet, faktor dalaman, Perang Dingin, pembangunan negara

## Introduction

Many represent Somalia as ‘unable to escape its past’ and often depict it as a stateless society (Hoahane, 2013; Dehez&Gebreworld, 2010). Having achieved its independence in the 1960s, Somalia was marked by dictatorial rule. Luigi Pestalozzi (1974, p. 40) described the first republic as ‘...one of the most corrupted and inept regimes that had grown up in Africa in the shadow of neo-colonialism’. By the mid-1960s, Somalia had slipped into ‘an artificial democracy’ (Lewis, 1993) or ‘commercialised anarchy’ (Lewis, 1982), which successively paved the way for the military regime of General Mohamed Siad Barre to seize power in the 1970s. During Barre’s military regime, Somalia was subjected to mounting interventions and external prescriptions by both the United States and the Soviet Union and their Cold War politics in Africa. Since the collapse of Barre’s regime in 1991, Somalia has

struggled to build political order due to the challenges of terrorism, piracy, and trans-border criminal activities as well as other non-traditional security issues (Shaw, 2014; Aime, 2013).

The political history and state formation in Somalia have been studied extensively. The majority of such studies have adopted the 'Orthodox Failed State Narratives' (Verhoeven, 2009, p. 406). The contemporary international commitment that underpins these narratives can be regarded as a source rather than a solution to the problem. The global state-building and peacebuilding projects are often pursued through heavy foreign involvement and its top-down impositions which may sometimes be contrary to local aspirations. With the recent publication of Christopher Clapham's *The Horn of Africa: State Formation and Decay* (2017), it is more important to invigorate how Somalia's troubled past hindered ongoing attempts of building political order, law, and security in the present situation of the country. While the literature attempts to mostly focus on recent Western intervention in different conflict zones in Africa, it is important to illuminate Cold War intervention in Somalia. In short, the Cold War foreign prescriptions in Somalia (under Barre) destroyed the social contracts between the state and society. Menkhaus noted that it is crucial to acknowledge the fact that Somalia's early independence period and the substantial implications of foreign intervention have rarely been assessed before things fell apart, or before the state failed in 1991. Such a view could shed light on previously underappreciated aspects of the nation, particularly the Soviet involvement in Somalia and the Cold War politics (Menkhaus, 2014, p. 562).

This paper discusses how foreign intervention exacerbates the current inability of Somali society to forge state and nation building. It is argued that while the socio-political construction of post-independent Somalia has been more contested than depicted, foreign intervention during the Cold War accelerated the state's collapse in 1991. By revisiting the immediate post-colonial period of Somalia under the Soviet Union's influence (1969-1978), our aim is not to suggest that we should neglect the internal factors to state collapse in Somalia, but to highlight the destructive costs of foreign intrusions (as an external factor) on state-building. Such intervention has exacerbated internal problems to become more pervasive and obstructed attempts to restore political order in Somalia.

This paper first explores the framework in explaining the trajectory of state and nation-building in Somalia. After outlining the framework to discuss state-making, this paper will discuss Cold War Somalia under the short-lived influence of the Soviets in three specific areas: i) scientific socialism as a national ideology; ii) socialist economic policy; and iii) military and foreign policies of Siad Barre between 1969-1978. The paper concludes by probing the overall effects of the Cold War foreign intervention and its significant impact on contemporary or post-conflict state building in Somalia.

### **State Making as ‘Rule Standardisation’ in Somalia**

The consequences of foreign intervention on state and nation-building in Somalia are conceptualised using Balthasar’s (2014) ‘rule standardisation’. Within the literature of the modern political history of Somalia, it is accepted that a point of reference to the origins of an acceptable governance structure developed in the 1960s when Somalia achieved its independence under the recognition of both Britain and Italy (see Pham, 2011). When then President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke was assassinated on October 21, 1969, the public was concerned with the inability of the civilian regime, and initially supported the military in seizing control in Mogadishu (C. A. H. Jaras, personal communication, October 21, 2011). In consolidating his military rule (1969-1991), Barre immediately deposed the civilian government and sought external support from the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Mankhaus (2009), Elliot & Holzer (2009), Retino & Shaw (2017) and Clapham (2007) criticised the existing literature on state building in Somalia for its heavy focus on institutional aspects of state building and downplaying the exogenous roles of foreign actors in securing their interests and hindering state and nation-building in Somalia. In this respect, this paper borrows the analytical concept of ‘state making’ is best understood as a two-part process of rule standardisation’ proposed by Balthasar (2014) on state authority projections in the Horn of Africa. Drawing from the political ethnographic writings of Clapham (1996) and Anderson and Broch-Due (2000) on history, politics and philosophy of East Africa, Balthasar (2014, p. 225) concluded two important spectrums in discussing the projection of state authority in Somalia.

First, state-making is similar to state-building in terms of institutional standardisation in which the rules of the game (written laws and political

regulations) produced by political factions dominate and regulate all types of political relations in the society (p. 225). Second, state-building intersects with nation-building. This standardises the national identity as a common idea of the state or rules of the public mind (p. 226).

Nonetheless, in the broad literature of fixing failed states and foreign intervention, the international solution is often underpinned by the neoliberal or liberal peace's logic of hybridity, pluralism, and diversity (see also Ginty, 2015). While it is true that political pluralism cements democracy in advanced nations, the initial state-making endeavours are not pluralistic, but a focus on the rules of state and nation-building as historically exhibited in Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* and John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (Balthasar, 2014, p.227).

In short, translating this understanding into theoretical considerations of state making means that the competitive and diverse political factions need to pave the way for the state framework and centrally regulated authority that is less contested, and more united and credible in defending the nation-state from external and internal threats (see Young, (2004; Taylor, 2010). Consequently, state making is the overall process that begins with standardisation to forge common parameters for state unity and identity. Along these lines, Anderson (2006), North (1990), Levene (2000), Clapham (1996, 2017), Bayart (2009) and Chabal & Daloz (1999) argued that in the beginning, the state exists not to promote diversity, but to organise policies – either by force or voluntarily – to be uniform in a real sense. Yet, and as critiqued by Paris (2004), Sisk (2013), and Richmond (2011), the salient institutionalist focus of state-building prevalent in the literature of state-making in Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, and Iraq glosses over another critical aspect of state making, namely foreign intervention.

If colonialism has delayed the modern transformation (Ayoob, 1995) of Africa by preventing it from consolidating its central political authority after independence, then the neo-imperialism exemplified through foreign intervention and proxy wars during the Cold War (Nkrumah, 1974) exacerbated past and present state-making activities in Somalia. While we recognise the continued inabilities of local political agencies in filling the vacuum of central political authority and national ideology in Somalia, it is pertinent to revisit the Soviet's role in implementing contradictory policies. This shall serve as a reminder that

the ongoing conflicts in various parts of Somalia are still awash with the remnants of the Cold War.

### **The Military Rule in Somalia under Soviet Guidance (1969-1978)**

For Moscow, Somalia was a tinderbox of tension, prized for its strategic location in securing the Soviet's military base and access to oil and trade routes in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aqaba, and the greater Indian Ocean (Schmidt, 2013). Beset by its internal inability to develop a central authority after the military seized power in 1969, to cope with the existing disputes with Ethiopia and Kenya, and the United States' rejection of USD 9 million to upgrade its army, Siad Barre announced Somalia's commitment to the tenets of scientific socialism (Griffiths, 2016). Accordingly, on its first anniversary in October of 1970, Barre announced that scientific socialism would guide the country and changed its name to the Somali Democratic Republic (Ismail, 2010, p. 219). For Barre, to have a strong bond with the Soviets was crucial, as they provided him aid during the Cold War, which in actuality was due to the fact that the Soviets were interested in Somalia's strategic location in Africa and the Middle East.

The Soviets were providing political advice and economic aid, as well as military training and weapons. On July 1974, the Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny paid an official visit to Mogadishu, and Somalia signed several treaties with the Soviets including the Somali-Soviets' Friendship Treaty on July 11, 1974. However, the Soviet's influence in Somalia was short-lived with the outbreak of the Somali-Ethiopian War (1977-1978) in which both Somalia and Ethiopia effectively switched sides in the Cold War (Brayton, 1979, p. 260). The Horn of Africa witnessed the enduring persistence of both USSR and the US who were happy to exploit the local war (Schmidt, 2013, p. 24). Somalia came to a disagreement with the Soviets during the 1977-78 war, and the shifting proxies solidified the new alliance of superpowers and their geostrategic interests in the Horn of Africa. This fallout with Moscow eventually backfired upon the existing tensions in Somalia and affected Barre's authority to suppress local opposition.

### **Scientific Socialism as National Ideology**

As noted earlier, on October 21, 1970, the military regime announced that scientific socialism is the only cure for underdevelopment and



tribalism (Pestalozzi, 1974, p. 54). Even 46 years after the beginning of military rule, it was debated as to whether the Soviets had a role in assisting the army to seize power, especially given the Mogadishu-Moscow ties since 1963. Copper (2008, p. 17) stated, “Following the military coup of 1969, Soviet military assistance to Somalia increased substantially, and several hundred Soviet officers (military advisers) and technicians with more equipment were to follow” Recently declassified documents from US intelligence confirmed the Soviet’s intentions in securing a military base in the Horn of Africa (Clapham, 2017, p. 45; Schmidt, 2013, p. 234). While Barre’s initial request for US support was turned down by President Lyndon Johnson<sup>1</sup>, the Soviets were more than keen to transform Somalia into a socialist state. As a result, Somalia became a bona fide member of the Eastern bloc, and Barre’s policies were praised by Moscow (Galaydh, 1990, p.13).

In January 1971, the Second Charter came out with its detailed dedication to scientific socialism. By this time, Siad Barre knew how best to appease Moscow in order to secure its support for his regime (see Davidson, 1975). In the early 1970s, no other African socialist leader seemed to enjoy a special friendship with the Soviets as much as Barre, especially with his official visit to the Kremlin (Traub, 2010, p. 83). In return, the Soviets promised more weapons and financial aid to Mogadishu, who had, for years, been Moscow’s closest African ally (Bridges, 2000, p. 6). As a result of these changes, Siad Barre’s picture was placed on par with pictures of Marx, Engels, and Lenin everywhere.

To ensure the successful implementation of his scientific socialism, Barre introduced the Domestic Seven-Point Policy as a domestic politics guideline – based on social justice, economic progress, illiteracy eradication and the development of a writing system for the Somali language, elimination of corruption and anarchy, and the abolishment of political parties. On November 11, 1970, during his public rally at the Cons Stadium, Barre declared tribalism as the enemy to nation-building and barred the practice of *diyah* (blood money) and certain Islamic traditions which were perceived as an impediment to the path of progress and scientific society (Schmidt, 2013, p. 238). In addition, he issued numerous political decrees which favoured a progressive society. His regime also abolished all clan titles such as sultan and chief (local authority) and dismissed every holder of these titles (Ismail, 2010, p. 235). State media, including newspapers, Radio Mogadishu

and Mogadishu's National Theatre, were used to indoctrinate the public on scientific socialism (S. A. Mohamud, Personal Communication, December 12, 2012).

Given Barre's obsession with Soviet guidance, not everyone in Somalia condoned the socialist path taken by his regime. Like other post-colonial African states, Somalia lacked political ideology in transforming the Somalians into citizens and the country into a modern state (Young, 2004; Taylor, 2010). This resulted in a disconnect between state and society and furthered 'dialectical difficulties' for Siad Barre to reconcile national ideological conflicts between the external impositions of scientific socialism and customary ideas of Islam and clan affiliations (Hohne, 2006, p. 405). Hence, various militaristic legal decrees were enacted throughout the reign of Barre (Samatar, 1994, p. 38). These laws provided extra-draconian legal and executive powers for his military regime to use violence in dealing with dissidents (Ismail, 2010, p. 220).

At the same time, Somalia's unholy alliance with the Soviets was followed with a mixed response from various segments of Somalia. Barre received immediate support from the military, middle-class professionals, intellectuals, and community leaders who came from similar clans as Barre. Dissident views came from various sheikhs (traditional religious leaders) who refused to accept Barre's view on cushioning political Islam with scientific socialism (Rabasa, 2009, p. 10). He tried to convince many sheikhs that scientific socialism was not against the tenets of Islam but disproved the reactionary elements of religion that dominate the sound reasoning of mankind and hence, hinder the progress of society. This is clear evidence that Islam was readily misused and ignored by both Barre and traditional sheikhs when debating the national identity of Somalia in the 70s (see also Loimeier, 2013). In fact, by 1975, the state-owned media attempted to interpret Islam in favour of Barre's socialism, which was in contrast to the sheikhs' interpretation (Bradbury, 2008, p. 37).

Failure to appease the dissident sheikhs who later declared Barre an infidel led to their arrest and sentencing to death by firing squad in Mogadishu on January 23, 1975. Hundreds fled, massive numbers were imprisoned, and ten sheikhs were executed because of their opposition to Siad Barre's regime. According to Rabasa (2009, p. 12), the dissident

sheikhs' views were in line with the Qur'ān (5: 11). According to Sheikh Ali Mohamoud (Personal Communication, December 12, 2012), the execution of these sheikhs deeply affected society's loyalty to the state and initiated grave nonconformity between the state and the society. The people did not trust Siad Barre's political slogans and accused him of murdering innocent Muslims to appease his communist patrons. The situation was exacerbated by all political oppositions being harassed, prosecuted or murdered.

In sum, the military elements in justifying scientific socialism were problematic and contested by various political factions (see also Schmidt, 2008; Schlee, 2013). Underlying the regime's extensive reform was manipulative implementation and the extra-judicial and militaristic nature of the state to control the people and consolidate Barre's rule (Issa-Salwe, 1996, p. 80). This created discord and resistance to contemporary attempts of state-building in Somalia.

### **The Socialist Economic Model**

Somalia's economic policy was moulded to achieve the objectives of the socialist government (Mohamud, 2006, p. 92). This was materialised by nationalising the properties of Italians and accusing them of representing capitalist institutions. Barre disrupted the Italians' economic ties with the local elites. Given the bleak economic and governance records of the previous civilian government, it is fairly understandable why the public warmly received his nationalistic economic views, and nearly no one rejected Barre's New Economic Policy (Desfosses, 1987). By removing the existing modern economic system introduced by the Italians, Barre's central economic model was initially in line with many Somalis' aspirations to eradicate poverty, economic injustice, and other socioeconomic disadvantages structured by the former colonial master's greed and grievance (Clapham, 2017, p. 34). The regime's final goal was to interfere with the state's financial and banking systems, and in May 1970, Somalia witnessed a dramatic change to its financial system when Mogadishu nationalised four international banks, mostly from Italy and Egypt. With the forced acquisition of modern economic institutions, Barre marked the collapse of modern fiscal systems. Since then, it has been a painstaking effort to rebuild Somalia's war-torn economy (Pham, 2011, p. 149).

To show his readiness to eradicate foreign control of the economy, Barre increased the Somali Central Bank's power to regulate the state's financial jurisdictions, particularly the exchange rate. For foreign currencies, including the US dollar, the Central Bank set its rates such that black-market exchanges were seen as serious crimes, with possible punishments of 15 to 20 years imprisonment (Lewis, 2002). In Mogadishu's view, the state had the right to control its assets (Lewis, 1993; 2002; 1982).

Because of these simplistic economic views, Barre issued decrees overnight, and Mogadishu adopted price controls and various central planning instruments to fix prices for livestock to reduce the price of food. To control the everyday economic transaction of his people, his regime increased rental rates, the flow of money, and foreign exchange. Siad Barre's patronage rules eventually extended to microeconomics when he established a state-owned Agricultural Development Corporation to control the local agricultural sector, resulting in high prices and the destruction of the rice cultivation industry (Samatar, 1994, p. 97). Within a few years Siad Barre's economic policy was failing and relying on the rhetorical crusades against the exploitation of local bourgeoisie, despite the fact that a real bourgeoisie never existed in Somalia (see also Markakis & Waller, 1986).

The sudden nationalisation imposed upon the Italian business interests in Somalia as the 'imagined enemy' affected foreign trade as the state took over the import of cereals, fuel, medicine, films, and later, the export of bananas, hides and skins (Lewis, 2002, p. 86). The areas most affected were the agricultural and livestock sectors in which the net profit for production became less than the original investment, leaving no incentive for farmers to continue farming. Society perceived the state's pricing policy as oppression. From village to village, trade became a crime, and security checkpoints were set up across the country to stop inter-village trading. This policy was not only against society's well-being as envisioned by Barre, but unintendedly created the culture of aid dependency with the Soviets (Woodward, 2002).

Barre's hasty economic policy negated his people's aspiration to progress. According to Bridges (2000, p. 99), part of the problem stemmed from "Barre's poor understanding of economics but exacerbated by his obsessions with socialism". His Soviet advisers encouraged scientific

socialism, which in its early years enjoyed the support of many educated Somalis. It was evident that the Soviets intentionally concealed Barre's impractical economic policies from public knowledge given Moscow's main concern was to rival the US in the Horn of Africa (Bayart, 2009; Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Traub, 2010). In reality, Barre's central economic model caused more perplexities since it was not easy for ordinary Somalis to apply Marxist theory in local economic practices. In fact, neither true capitalism nor socialism had ever been part of the Somalian state and society (Markakis & Waller, 1986; Woodward, 2002).

This paper notes that given the destruction of documented evidence during the civil war in the 1990s, it is nearly impossible to acquire reliable econometric data on Somalia under Siad Barre's administration. According to Pestalozzi (1974, p. 36), in the 1970s Somalia was one of the most backward of all African nations with a declining GDP per capita. It was among the poorest in the world. In terms of economic output, there was only a marginal difference between Somalia under the socialist regime and the previous civilian regime (Mohamud, 2006, p. 93). Scientific socialism appears to be nothing more than a slogan reminiscent of Soviet presence as it did little to help Somalia escape poverty (Ottaway, p. 1982, p. 72).

### **Somalia's Militaristic Worldview and Foreign Policy**

Barre adopted a militaristic view in formulating Somalia's foreign policy as an extension of its domestic policy (Woodward, 2002). Upon seizing power in Mogadishu, Siad Barre responded to the US's reluctance to provide USD 9 million to modernise Somalia's military capability by turning to the Soviets (Lewish, 2002). He dishonoured the agreements made by the previous Somali civilian government with Italy, West Germany, and the US whereby they had agreed to offer a paltry USD10 million, provided Somalia agreed to end its diplomatic ties with the Soviets (Schmidt, 2013). Barre then accepted the Soviet's initial offer of USD 32 million which later increased to USD 55 million, including a complete package of training 10,000 Somali soldiers. Somalia's acceptance brought an end to the monopoly of the Western block in arms sales and initiated the flow of arsenal from the Soviets (Desfosses, 1987). By the 1970s, Barre expelled a number of American diplomats, military attaches, and Peace Corps workers and the US retaliated by concluding its economic and partial military ties with Somalia.

In response, the Soviet Union intensified its economic and military support for Somalia's foreign policy with an augmented number of 1000 Soviet advisers in Mogadishu (Griffiths, 2016). In short, the Soviets were Somalia's only source of military equipment including tanks, fighter planes, and bombers in the 70s. Between 1971 and 1974, around 1400 Soviet personnel actively advised Barre's regime on political ideology, economic planning and foreign policy orientations. (Schmidt, 2013, p. 78). In fact, Somalia was among the first sub-Saharan African countries that signed a treaty of friendship with Moscow, procuring a total of USD 30 million worth of weapons and military equipment. By 1976, with 22,000 infantry and soldiers, Somalia was the fourth most heavily armed nation on the African continent (Brayton, 1979). Given such peculiarities of Cold War Africa, it is not hard to imagine the antagonistic nature of Barre's foreign policy when he came to power. He outlined his foreign policy's orientation with six articles.<sup>2</sup> These six articles were aligned with the Soviets' worldview during the Cold War. Articles one and two supported Soviet propaganda (Colombant, 2011) while article three advanced the idea of Greater Somalia. In other words, in building Somalia, the military regime was using 'struggle' to fight against other African states to realise the notion of Greater Somalia.

Ironically, articles four and five contradicted articles one and two, as they categorically recognised the principality of peaceful coexistence among nations and called for a policy of positive neutrality. The problem lay in the fact that if Somalia supported the liberation movements in neighbouring Eastern African countries, then it could not be expected to maintain neutrality in its foreign policy (see also Lewis, 2002). Barre appeared willing to support separatist movement such as the Somali Western Liberation Front's (SWLF) struggle against Ethiopia, which violated articles four, five, & six of his foreign policy orientations. In this respect, there is reason to question how mutual respect for sovereignty principles could be attained by Somalia when Barre's regime did not hesitate to support the WSLF against the Ethiopian armed forces. Additionally, Barre had promised to respect all international legal commitments undertaken by the previous Somalia Republic, including adherence to the UN Charter, which obligates all nations to refrain from hostile policies and military intervention in other countries (including Somalia's traditional enemies, Ethiopia and Kenya).

Hence, it could be argued that while Barre's worldview is a paradox to Somalia as a Third World country. It was the existing structural dependency of Mogadishu upon Moscow in the 1970s that exposed the vulnerability of its domestic affairs. Even if Barre expressed his recognition of all international commitments (undertaken by the previous Somali Republic), his militaristic views of securing Greater Somalia was in violation of the Organization of African Union (OAU) commitments to retain colonial boundaries. Since he needed public support, he re-energised the Greater Somalia project as one of his foreign policy goals, while still harbouring the hypocrisy of respect for sovereignty (which he never practised) (Woodward, 2002). The army's nationalist doctrine, the regime's militaristic view, and the Soviets' weaponry together created many complications that Somalia found it challenging even to defend its existing territorial integrity.

Given such delicate intricacy and selectivity, it is not difficult to recognise the immediate Soviet influence on Barre's foreign policy. In terms of international relations, he classified the world into two rival blocs. This worldview reflected the existing tensions between the USSR and the US (Clapham, 2017, p. 56). Additionally, in constructing the idea of the state and nation, Barre was as equally opportunistic as his predecessor in redefining Somalia's threats. Accordingly, colonialism and neo-colonialism were seen as the greatest threat to the well-being of Somalis (Samatar, 1994, p.116). In line with Siad Barre's vision of Greater Somalia, the Somali national army was training and providing light weapons to various separatist Somali movements from the eastern region of Ethiopia – defying the impossibility by killing two birds (intersecting irredentism and separatism) with one stone (Samatar, 1987, p. 675). Somalia's foreign policy under the Soviets was marked by profound contradictions and a vivid attempt to maintain the autonomy of a weak political order while deliberately gambling the future of the country (Ottaway, 1982, p.71). Despite numerous attempts and difficulties faced by Barre in building a Greater Somalia, foreign intervention under the short-lived presence of the Soviets accelerated the process of Somalia eventually becoming a failed state.

### **Conclusion: Still Searching to become a State**

This paper demonstrated the Soviet Union's contribution to Somalia's state-making attempts whereby Moscow's ill-advice on the national,

economic, and foreign policies exacerbated the existing difficulties of Somali's political agency to develop standardised rules of political order to unify the nation. What was previously regarded as purely internal factors (extremism and tribalism) are consequences or indications of the poor governance of Barre's military regime. To sustain his state and nation-building under the auspices of Moscow, including finding support for his scientific socialism, central economic policy and militaristic foreign policy, Barre opted for repressive, draconian measures. These disintegrated Somali society and led to the collapse of vital state institutions. It supported the emergence of extremism and tribalism which are often cited as impediments to contemporary conflict resolution in rebuilding Somalia since the end of the Cold War.

Given the salient character of the Soviet guidance during Barre's reign, we find that although Somalia is often presumed as unwilling or unable to be governed, many of the predicaments that plague the Horn of Africa today are not solely the product of Somalia's political agency but are also interrelated with the outcome of foreign interventions in African affairs (see also Schmidt, 2013). This established the idea of foreign intervention as intrusions by political powers external to Africa. As such, interventions were structured in the form of unsymmetrical power relations between African states and the superpowers. Apart from aggression and war, foreign intervention during the Cold War manifested in the form of policy engagement, political involvement and ideological commitment, including the use of the carrot and stick approach by foreign actors to meddle in Somalia's domestic affairs. More often, intervention has adverse consequences (Clapham, 2017). Given the destructiveness of Soviet collaborations with Barre's regime, it is not hard to imagine the persistence of post-colonialism and the image of the white man's burden in contextualising post-Cold War Somalia when perceiving the idea of foreign advice or prescriptions in post-conflict reconstruction or rebuilding stateless Somalia (Bakonyi, 2013).

In struggling to secure superpower support to realise his ambitions in building a future for Greater Somalia, Barre unintentionally created a radical socialist state system which altered the existing customary values and traditional social relations that pitched the zero-sum game of modernity versus traditions, and secularism versus Islamism (see Barnes & Hassan, 2007). In return, the Soviets secured Somalia (short-lived though) as their proxy against the existing Western sphere of



influence in Africa and provided the security assurances requested by Siad Barre. As a result, a long-lasting distrust among political clans in Somalia towards the idea of central state authority was triggered off (Lindley, 2013). Those painstaking years and the grave mistakes of Said Barre that dishonoured his people have allowed the already fragmented Somali political community to easily retreat to radical interpretations of Islam to cater for the harsh political reality of living in a stateless Somalia.

### Endnotes

1. Having achieved its independence in the 1960s, Somalia, under the civilian government, had requested military aid from President Kennedy (1961-1963). When Siad Barre came to power in 1969, he initially requested similar aid from the US, but President Johnson (1963-1969) refused, and eventually this pushed Barre to seek similar aid from the Soviet.
2. *Somalia Today*. (1970), printed by the State Printing Agency, p. 46.

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