

SOMALIA – CASE STUDY ON THE FRAGMENTATION OF AN ETHNICALLY AND CIVILIZATIONALLY HOMOGENEOUS STATE

Assoc. Prof. Alba Iulia Catrinel POPESCU, PhD*

Any lecture in geopolitics begins by stating that internal stability and territorial integrity of the state are the result of the interaction between secessionist, centrifugal forces, and unifying, centripetal forces. The same lecture in geopolitics also says that ethnic and confessional homogeneity falls into the category of the strongest centripetal forces, along with a round shape of the state territory, the centrality of the capital, a uniform distribution of transport and communications infrastructure, an equitable (as possible) distribution of wealth, of a strong national idea and will.

Ethnically and religiously, Somalia is a homogeneous state. Moreover, all these ethnics do not boast of an identity other than Somali, and they all speak Somali - the official language of the state, along with Arabic – the language of the Koran. Somalia does not have the huge linguistic diversity specific to other post-colonial African states, there are no cultural-civilizational differences, there are no major discrepancies in terms of regional development and distribution of communications and transport infrastructure in the territory. And yet, the Somali state is the expression of the notion of a failed state, ravaged by civil war, secessionism, maritime piracy, terrorism, organized crime and insecurity. In recent years, Somalia has been consistently ranked among the most dangerous destinations in the world. In the first half of 2021, it ranked sixth in the top of the riskiest tourist destinations, after Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen¹.

What are the causes of Somali secessionism and the collapse of the state? And, if we were to rank, according to the intensity of the effect, the secessionist factors acting on the territory of Somalia, what would be their order?

Keywords: Somalia; Horn of Africa; Gulf of Aden; Somaliland; Puntland; maritime piracy; terrorism; secessionism.

1. Short geographical description

Somalia is located in the Horn of Africa, on the Southern coast of the Gulf of Aden, in the immediate vicinity of the strategic chokepoint Babel Mandeb, and the Western Indian Ocean, on the transport corridor linking Europe and the Middle East to Asia. To the North, it borders Djibouti. To the West, it borders Ethiopia and Kenya. In the South, it is crossed by the Equator and, also in the South, are the hydrographic basins of the Jubba and Shebelle rivers (see the map in Fig.1). It has a wide seafront, of 3025 km, and a total area of 637,657 sqkm. There are deep natural harbors in Mogadishu, Berbera and Kismaayo, but dangerous coral reefs keep coastal traffic to a minimum².

It is a continental state, with an elongated shape along the coast, without islands, with no enclaves and no exclaves on the territories of other states. The colonial-style state capital, Mogadishu, is located eccentrically, in the South, on the shores



Figure 1 Physical-geographical map of Somalia³

of the Indian Ocean, far-away from the Northern regions of the country.

With the exception of a secluded mountainous area on the Northern coast, the relief of Somalia is

*"Carol I" National Defence University
e-mail: albapopescu1@gmail.com

flat, with no natural barriers restricting the mobility of humans and animals. In general, the climate is dry and warm, with irregular rainfall. There are also warm, humid, monsoon periods in the Northeast, from December to February, and in the Southwest, from May to October⁴. The vegetation is savannah and semi-desert⁵.

It is rich in uranium and has reserves, largely unexploited, of iron ore, tin, gypsum, bauxite, copper, sea salt, coal, natural gas and, most likely, oil⁶. Mineral sepiolite (sea foam) deposits in Central and Southern Somalia are among the largest known reserves in the world⁷. Terrestrial fauna has been largely decimated by hunting. Elephants in particular have been killed, causing major imbalances in the ecosystem, knowing that these mammals have the ability to find groundwater and to access it, preventing desertification⁸. The aquatic fauna was also destroyed by chemical pollution. Arable land represents only 1.75% of the territory's surface⁹. Agricultural land represents 70.3% of the territory, of which 68.5% is permanent pasture¹⁰.

2. Brief demographic description

In 2021, the total population of the African state was 12,094,640. According to data provided by the CIA WorldFactbook, in 2021 the ethnic structure of Somalia was overwhelmingly dominated by 85% of ethnic Somalis, and the religious structure was perfectly homogeneous, with 100% Sunni Muslims¹¹ from Shāfi'ī law school¹².

Somali ethnic groups are divided into clans and sub-clans. The largest are: Darod, Dir, Hawiye, Isaaq, Rahanweyn (Digil and Mirifle).

Somalia's population is unevenly distributed. The Northeastern and Central, semi-desert regions, as well as the areas along the border with Kenya, are less populated, while the areas around the cities of Mogadishu, Marka, Boorama, Hargeysa and Baidoa have a dense population.

Like other African states, Somalia has the demographic profile of a state dominated by underdevelopment and poverty, characterized by:

- the age-based pyramid with a large base, as a result of the majority percentage, of 60%, of the young population, up to 25 years old;
- increased value of the gross birth rate, which in 2020 was 38.25 births / 1000 inhabitants (9th place in the world);
- increased fertility rate of 5.41 births / woman of childbearing age (9th place overall);

- increased value of the gross mortality rate of 11.82 deaths / 1000 inhabitants;
- low life expectancy at birth, of only 55.32 years (57.7 years women, 53.02 years men) – compared to 81.3 years in the European Union (EU)¹³;
- huge infant mortality, of 88.03 deaths / 1000 live births (2nd place overall) – compared to 3.4 ‰ in the EU¹⁴;
- huge maternal mortality, of 829 deaths / 100,000 live births (6th place overall);
- increased mortality from infectious-contagious diseases, which can be prevented by proper sanitation and hygiene¹⁵.

These statistical-demographic aspects are added the social ones, just as gloomy. The enrollment rate in primary education exceeds just 40%, there are only 0.02 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants and 0.9 hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants, urbanization covers only 46.7% of the population and 27.5% of the population rural area does not have access to drinking water sources¹⁶. The median prevalence of malnutrition for the last three years among the Somali population was between 10-14.9%¹⁷.

3. Political-administrative data

The Federal Republic of Somalia became an independent state on July 1st, 1960. It is a presidential republic, divided into thirteen administrative regions and five other regions claimed but not controlled by the central government in Somaliland.

These regions are represented by: Awdal, Bakool, Banaadir, Bari, Bay, Galguduud, Gedo, Hiiraan, Jubbada Dhexe (Middle Jubba), Jubbada Hoose (Lower Jubba), Mudug, Nugaal, Sanaag, Shabeellaha Dhexe (Shabeelle Middle), Hoose (Lower Shabeelle), Sool, Togdheer, Woqooyi Galbeed.

In turn, the regions are divided into seventy-two districts and eighteen other claimed but uncontrolled districts in Somaliland¹⁸.

Somalia is a failed state, whose central government no longer administers its entire national territory and no longer has a monopoly on the exercise of force at national level (SEE MAP IN Fig.2). Currently, within the Somali state there are separatist and / or self-declared autonomous territories such as:

- Somaliland, located in the North, self-declared sovereign state;
- Puntland, located in the Northeast, self-



declared autonomous state with publicly stated secessionist intentions¹⁹;

- Khatumo, located in Southern Somaliland, self-declared autonomous but not recognized by the central government;
- Galmudug, located in the Central area, South of Puntland, self-declared autonomous;
- Jubaland, located in the Southeast, on the border with Kenya, self-declared autonomous²⁰.

As can be seen in the map in Fig. 2, the decentralization and dissolution of the Somali state is amplified by the existence of spaces controlled by Islamist authorities, governed by Islamic law and the ultra-conservative legal school, Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah. Existing mainly in the Central-Southern regions, towards the Aden coast, these areas develop secessionist potential through the dogmatic and ideological conflict between the Shāfi'ī moderate, traditional, legal school, and the

Ḥanābilah ultraconservative legal school, imported from the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. A legal school that considers as apostasy any faith and dogma that does not belong to Ḥanābilah Sunni Islam²².

4. Economic data

With a GDP (PPP) estimated in 2021 of \$ 5.37 billion²³ and a GDP / Capita in 2020 of \$ 309.41²⁴, Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its main sources of income come from foreign aid, remittances and informal trade. About three-fifths of Somalia's economy is made up of agriculture. Agricultural income comes from three sub-sectors: nomadic pastoralism, focused on raising goats, sheep, camels and cattle; traditional, subsistence farming, practiced by small farmers; intensive agriculture, with irrigated plantations along the lower Jubba and Shabeelle rivers. The

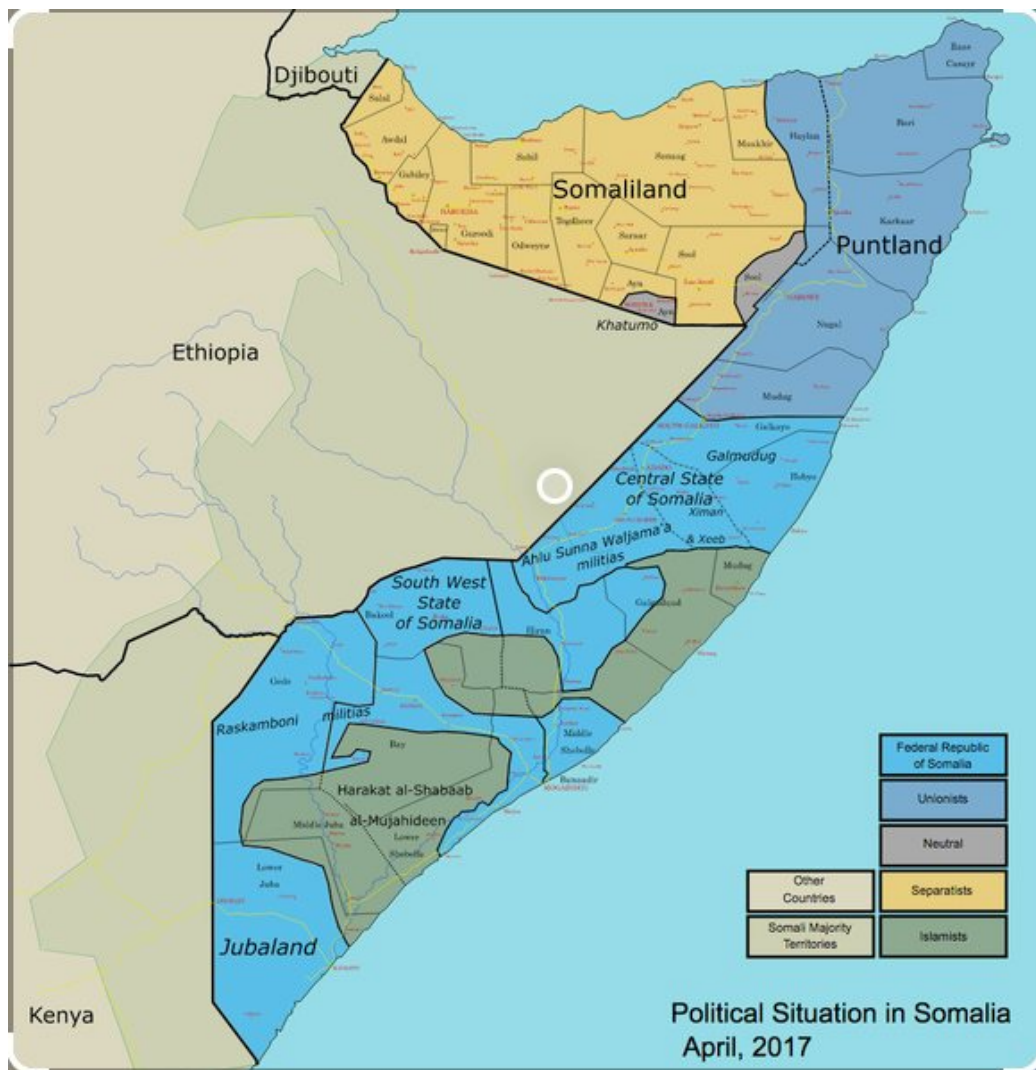


Figure 2 The political situation in Somalia in 2017²¹

main crops and agricultural products are sugar cane, rice, cotton, vegetables, bananas, grapefruit, mango and papaya. Incense and myrrh are also harvested in the South, and savanna acacia forests provide timber. There is also an income from fishing, which is declining due to marine pollution and overfishing²⁵.

Since after 1991 the construction of the hydroelectric dam on the Jubba River was stopped and the few power plants in Mogadishu, Hargeysa (Hargeisa) and Kismaayo, still defective, do not cover the energy needs of a modern production activity, the industrial sector is reduced to small craftsmen workshops belonging to the informal sector²⁶.

The banking sector is controlled by the Central Bank of Somalia. The country's currency, the Somali shilling, is in constant decline. The self-declared Republic of Somaliland issues its own currency, the Somaliland Shilling²⁷.

There are no railways. The road network is only 2,900 km. In the rainy season, most rural settlements are not accessible to vehicles. In rural areas, the main means of transport remain camels, cattle and donkeys²⁸.

5. The geopolitical premises of current secessionism

The exceptional geopolitical and geostrategic value of the Horn of Africa began to assert itself in 1497, with the discovery of the road to the Indies by the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama (1460 / 1469-1524). The European colonization of Asia and the development of trade in timber and precious stones, spices and oriental silks, transformed the ports on both banks of the Gulf of Aden into mandatory destinations for ships carrying goods from the Orient and Africa to European countries (see map in Fig.3).

Later, in the contemporary period, the construction of the Suez Canal exponentially increased the geostrategic and geo-economic importance of the region, through the oil and natural gas transit from the Arabian Peninsula to European consumers and by intensifying maritime traffic generated by the Chinese and Indian economic recovery. The geostrategic importance of the region is also amplified by the presence of the Bab el-Mandeb maritime chokepoint, which separates the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean

from the Red Sea and, further, from the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea. Closing this strategic strait would disconnect the Mediterranean Sea from the Indian Ocean, forcing carriers to bypass Africa through the Cape of Good Hope (with serious economic and military consequences). In 2018, approximately 6.2 million barrels per day of crude oil and refined petroleum products circulated through the Bab el-Mandeb chokepoint to Europe, the United States and Asia. In 2017, total oil flows through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait accounted for about 9% of the volume of oil globally traded at sea (crude oil and refined petroleum products)²⁹.

The region has a pivotal character and a potential bridgehead character. Its domination facilitates the geostrategic control of Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and the Indian Ocean, which is why, since the post-war bipolarity of the international system, it has been the subject of intense dispute between the hegemonic powers. The geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic



Figure 3 Gulf of Aden³⁰

stakes for the control of the region and, in extenso, for the control of North and East Africa and of the Arabian Peninsula, transformed this area of geopolitical compression between the maritime and the continental world, and between Christianity and Islam, in a "shatterbelt". An area subjected to fragmentation, conflict, underdevelopment and state failure.

In addition, deposits of hydrocarbons, uranium, strategic ores of bauxite, tin, copper, other non-ferrous and ferrous ores have been discovered in the basement of the countries of the region and



Islamic fundamentalism completes the already loaded political picture of this part of the world.

In the case of Somalia, from a geopolitical point of view, the elongated shape of the country and the eccentric capital predispose to secessionism, through the unequal distribution of the Mittelpunkt's force of attraction over borders. On the other hand, the relief dominated by the plateau and the savannah vegetation favor the migrations and the mixture of the population, aspect that can potentiate the centripetal, unifying forces. Unsuccessful, however, as the population is strongly divided on clanocratic regional criteria, which significantly exceed the common ethnic origin, language and Islamic Shāfi'ī denomination, division favored by the uneven distribution of the population in the territory, conditioned by the presence of semi-desert relief.

The destruction of the environment, by marine pollution and excessive hunting, and the extremely low percentage of arable land, coupled with climate change that has increased the incidence of drought episodes followed by locust infestations, especially in the Northern regions of the country, create food crisis of famine³¹, with destabilizing internal and regional consequences, which can accelerate internal secessionist processes.

These internal challenges are added poverty, underdevelopment, clanocratic neopatriarchy that have undermined the idea of central administration, of identity and national idea, of state authority, favoring secessionism and state dissolution.

6. The historical premises of the current secessionism

6.1. *The period preceding the unification of the two Somalis, British and Italian*

Local legends say that Islam entered Somalia in the eighth century, when a Yemeni imam, Mohamed Abdurahman Hambali, along with several followers, took refuge in the Galla tribe and started the process of converting the locals³². The current capital, Mogadishu, was founded in 900 AD by Arab merchants and locals converted to Islam.

Certainly, this time, as evidenced by historical sources, in the thirteenth century Islam was present in Somalia. The first regional state cores coagulated around its system of beliefs and values.

In the Northwest of the country the Sultanate of Adal was born. Later it entered into a bloody war of independence against Portuguese rule. The Ajuuraan Sultanate was formed in the Center and South of the country. Due to the animosities between the clans, nomadic attacks and Portuguese interference in local politics, in the 17th century, the territories ruled by the Warsangeli, Sanaag, Bari, Mogadishu, Benadir clans were conquered by the Arabs and, later, by the Ottomans. A century later, they would end up being colonized by Europeans. Local monarchies remained, with British support, until the twentieth century. A pragmatic support, in exchange for the protection provided by the sultans for the British merchant ships that transported goods from Indies³³.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the "race for Africa" started to disturb the British rule in the Horn of Africa. France and, later, Italy tried to gain territories in the region and to limit British control over the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden – where the Empire ruled the entire Nile Valley and the strategic port of Aden in Yemen – and over East Africa, where Kenya and Tanzania had become British colonies. As a result, the French, interested in Somali non-ferrous ore deposits, focused their interest on the Northeast of the country (present-day Djibouti), while the Italians, in full colonial expansion, took control of Southern Somalia.

Against this background of geopolitical competition between the colonial powers, in the first months of the twentieth century, the troops of Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia (1844-1913), supported by the British Empire, occupied the Ogaden region in Western Somalia. The Ethiopian occupation of Ogaden was interrupted by the rebellion of the Northern "dervishes", led by the French-backed sub-clan Darod (Dulbahante). The two-decade-old War between Somalis and Ethiopians, between 1900 and 1920, killed more than a third of Northern Somalia's population³⁴. Although the population of Ogaden and Haud was predominantly Somali, following the agreement imposed by the British on July 24, 1948, the two regions returned to Ethiopia³⁵. The arbitrary transfer of territories between the two states has become a permanent source of conflict and regional destabilization. The same agreement established that the territories of Southern Somalia should



return to Kenya, under the name of the North-East District, and the territory of the North, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, populated by Afar and ruled by France, to become independent, under the name of Djibouti. The years of "dervish" rebellion and regional instability have been paid by the economic and regional development, so that on July 1, 1960, there was a huge discrepancy between the two reunified independent Somalias, the British and the Italian one. An economic and social rift that fueled secessionism and the future civil war. In addition, in the South there was a strong Italian diaspora, which built colonial-type cities with extensive, prosperous and well-organized plantations. The Southern population, more easily colonized, benefited from the economic and cultural advantages of the colonizers. This aspect generated a fracture between the underdeveloped, anarchic North, crushed by clan fighting, and the peaceful and prosperous South. A hiatus amplified by cultural, linguistic and even by currency differences between the two Somalias. Consequently, at the Potsdam Conference of 1945, while Somalis in the Northern and Western regions advocated independence, those in the South wanted to remain under colonial rule³⁶.

On the other hand, during the Second World War, the conflict between the Brits and the Italians was transferred to the territory of Somalia. The North of Somalia, dominated by the Brits, started to fight with the South of the country, incorporated by the regime of the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) in the New Italian Empire of East Africa, along with Ethiopia and Eritrea. The victory of the British Empire was followed by the establishment of the Italian resistance in the South. Militarily supported by the Benito Mussolini regime, the resistance movement of the Italian colonists and the affiliated population of the South started a guerrilla war, which ended in 1943³⁷. After the war, the geopolitical competition between geostrategic players active in the region generated new rifts, by attracting Somali clans into different spheres of power and by using them as proxy-war vectors, so that, by the end of 1960s, the Somali clans had already their own paramilitary forces.

Against this background of intense fractionalization, the unification desired only by the North and the declaration of independence were overlapped, an aspect that brought with it the problem of the distribution of power between the

Somali clans and sub-clans.

From the sequence of events presented above, the following sources of conflict and fragmentation can be distinguished:

- the discrepancy between the aspirations for self-determination and national liberation, shared by the British-dominated population in the North, and the desire to maintain the colonial *status quo*, of the Italian-dominated Somali population in the South;
- economic and development gap between the North and the South of the country,
- rivalries between clans over the distribution of power and wealth;
- the interference of the great powers interested in the local geopolitical game.

6.2. The Communist experiment

The *de jure* unification of the two Somalias was followed by administrative, legislative and, implicitly, military unification. But the military unification involved the dismemberment of paramilitary units and their transformation into troops of the new national army, subject to a single command, an issue that triggered the dissatisfaction of some of the Northern clans, increasingly vocal in the direction of separation from the rest of the country. On the other hand, the supporters of Somali unity pressed the pedal of pan-Somalism³⁸ and the rebuilding of the "Greater Somalia". Matters that brought to the forefront the issue of Ogaden, reheated the Ethiopian-Somali conflict, and internationalized it in the spirit of the geopolitical game of the Cold War (1947-1991). Re-erupted in 1964, the armed conflict between the two countries was followed by a ceasefire agreement. While the US focused its aid on Ethiopia and pushed for the signing of a mutual defense pact against Somali revisionism between Kenya and Ethiopia³⁹, the Soviet Union, in exchange for the right to use Somali naval bases, developed a program to equip and train Somali troops. In this way, an entire generation of officers was influenced by Communist ideology, and from here to a military coup to replace democratic administration there was only a step⁴⁰. The assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke (1919-1969) on October 15, 1969, by one of his bodyguards⁴¹ was the catalyst for the events that ended with:

- the takeover of power by Generals Salad Gabeire Kediye (1933-1972) and Mohammad Syyad Barre (1910-1995);



- the establishment of the Supreme Revolutionary Council;
- the appointment of General Siad Barre as president of the country.

On October 21, 1969, the state was renamed the Democratic Republic of Somalia⁴² and became a Soviet satellite.

In the following years, the civil servants were replaced by the military⁴³, the civil courts were closed, the religious ones lost their importance, the law being applied by the military courts. Also, a new secret service was set up, called National Security Service, charged with identifying and counteracting any "counter-revolutionary" movement.

Like other African leaders of his generation, Barre became an autocrat. Self-entitled "Victorious Leader", Barre was the author of a unique Islamic-Communist doctrine that combined the principles of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist "scientific socialism" with Islamic teachings and was one of the founders of the Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party, affiliated to Moscow. Over time, although tribalism was considered a crime against national security, the political leadership of the state became the prerogative of three large clans, all from the North: Marehan (of Barre), Ogaden (of Barre's mother) and Daarood-Dulbahante (of Barre's son-in-law)⁴⁴.

Relying on Soviet support, but without prior consultation with the Kremlin, on July 13, 1977, Siad Barre ordered the Somali army to attack Ethiopia and to occupy the Ogaden region. But the regional geopolitical game of 1977 no longer resembled that of 1969. In 1974, following the coup orchestrated by the Military Council, led by Lt. Col. Atnafu Abate (1930-1977), Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie I (1892-1975), abdicated. In 1975, Mengistu Haile Mariam came to the forefront of Ethiopian politics and, with Soviet support, imposed the Communist dictatorship. A brutal dictatorship, whose victims included the former Emperor, the nobility, the clergy and political opponents, such as the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Abuna Theophilos (1910-1979), and Atnafu Abate himself, accused of counter-revolutionary activities⁴⁵.

Behind these geopolitical events were the Soviets, interested in consolidating their dominance in the Red Sea and Eritrea (which at that time was

incorporated into Ethiopia), given that Southern Yemen was already under their influence, and in creating a "corridor" to Central Africa, in order to boost future "democratic" movements on the continent. As a result, the Kremlin sided with Ethiopia in the war ignited by Siad Barre. Ethiopia ended diplomatic relations with the United States⁴⁶, and a year later, in 1978, it recaptured the Ogaden. Under these conditions, Somalia denounced the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR, expelled Soviet diplomatic personnel and military attachés, severed diplomatic relations with Cuba, and Siad Barre faced a serious internal and image crisis. Although initially seemed to want to help Somalia, President Jimmy Carter's administration, unwilling a new Vietnam, gave up the US involvement in the Ogaden affair. The Somali army has been decimated by Communist Ethiopia, Cuba and other fraternal countries. The war ended on March 23, 1978. In 1982, a new conflict broke out between Ethiopians and Somalis, with no major consequences.

The loss of Ogaden weakened the authority of the Siad Barre regime and allowed the clans to be re-armed. The decline of the Barre regime became apparent in 1986, when Siad Barre himself was targeted by an assassination attempt. Also, the Somali army was facing an accelerated process of fractionalization. On one side were positioned the constitutionalists, loyal to the regime, and on the other hand, the tribalists. The Barre regime lasted until 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the change in the global geopolitical game led to the fall of totalitarian regimes, including the one in Somalia.

6.3. *The Civil War*

Somalia is divided into four large rival clans with a lot of subclans, covering about 85% of the population:

- Darod, which rules Puntland and the Northern region on the border with Kenya;
- Hawiye, which controls the territory along the coast, located North of Mogadishu;
- Isaaq, which dominates Somaliland;
- Rahanwein, who rules in the North, towards the border with Ethiopia⁴⁷.

In 1991, Northern Somalia, dominated by the Isaaq clan, declared independence as Somaliland⁴⁸, with its capital at Hargiesa, while the Southern Somalia was crushed by clan fighting. In the



same year, several clans, reunited in the Somali Democratic Movement and the Somali Alliance, elected Ali Mahdi Muhammad (1939-2021) as President of Somalia. Their decision was challenged by other players on the political spectrum, represented by the Somali Unity Congress, led by General Mohamed Farrah Aidid (1934-1996), Somali National Movement, led by Abdirahman Ahmed Ali Tuur (1931-2003), and the Somali Patriotic Movement, led by Colonel Ahmed Omar Jess. On the other hand, Barre's followers in the Center and South of the country continued to fight for the "victorious leader" to return to power. Thus, were created the premises for the future civil war that would devastate the once stable and prosperous South.

Clan fighting and the drought, which affected the Horn of Africa in the 1980s, destroyed the infrastructure, the farms and the plantations in the fertile regions of Southern Somalia, causing famine and humanitarian disaster. UN intervened through the UNOSOM I mission, approved by the UN Security Council in 1992. The prerogatives of the UN military sent to Somalia were limited to defensive actions, which is why the United States formed a military coalition called UNITAF - Unified Task Force which, in December 1992, descended into Southern Somalia and restored order. In 1993, most UNITAF troops were replaced by UN forces in the UNOSOM II mission, which became the protagonists of an open conflict with General Aidid's rebels, in which 80 Pakistani soldiers and 19 American soldiers were killed in the battle of Mogadishu⁴⁹. In 1995, the UN decided to withdraw its troops, although the mission was not fully accomplished. In 1996, General Aidid was killed, the bloodiest local militia being "beheaded".

In 1998, the Northeast region declared itself autonomous under the name of Puntland. It was followed by Jubaland in the Southwest. In 1999, a fourth region, located in the Central-Southern area, declared itself autonomous under the leadership of the Rahaweyn Resistance Army (RRA). Later, it remained under the jurisdiction of the Transitional Federal Government with the capital at Baidoa, the only internationally recognized government. But rivalries between the clans continued. The Northern provinces did not accept the legitimacy of the transitional government in Baidoa or that of President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed⁵⁰, elected

by lawmakers in the new capital. As a result, the country's internal situation continued to deteriorate, with the government failing in its mission to ensure internal security, prosperity and stability. Somalia became a poor state, crushed by armed conflict between clans and subjugated by organized crime networks, piracy and terrorism.

6.4. The Islamist solution

Amid the collapse of the state and the food crisis (transformed into the greatest humanitarian crisis of all time⁵¹), the population turned to clanocracy and Islam. Gradually, Islamic courts replaced secular courts, restoring order in the coastal territories. If, traditionally, Somali Islam of the Shāfi'ī law school, was a moderated one, in the 1990s it began to be infiltrated by the ultra-conservative Ḥanābilah ideology brought by the petrodollars of the Arabian Peninsula. In 2000, the ultra-conservative Islamist forces behind these courts formed the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which enjoyed widespread acceptance among the population. Six years later, an armed conflict broke out between the ICU and the "warlords" gathered in the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT). At the end of the conflict, the Islamists took over control of the Central region. The transitional government, backed by Ethiopia and the United States, called on African Union aid, to send troops to restore "order". Africans avoided getting involved. Instead, Ethiopia acted by launching an air offensive on Somalia, followed by armored and artillery attacks⁵². The Islamists were rejected beyond Mogadishu and the Americans and the Ethiopians restored the so-called transitional government, with Ali Mohammed Gedi as prime minister⁵³.

On January 9, 2007, the United States intervened directly in the Somali conflict by bombing Islamist positions in the Ras Kamboni region. However, Islamist militias continued to attack Ethiopian troops and the transitional government. In December 2008, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed announced his resignation as President of Somalia, accusing the international community of not being involved in supporting the Baidoa government⁵⁴. Also, in Djibouti, under the auspices of the UN, the Cooperation Agreement between the transitional government and the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia (ARS) was signed.



Ethiopian troops were withdrawn, Islamist leader, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, was elected president, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, the son of the first Somali president, was designated prime minister.

And, last but not least, we have to mention the Islamists in *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen – The Mujahideen Youth Movement*, a terrorist organization founded in 2006⁵⁵, affiliated with *Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula* and the *Global Islamist Network*⁵⁶. Most likely detached from the ranks of UTI followers, Al-Shabaab defined himself as the main opponent of any Western and international support given to the famine-stricken population and of any Western presence in the region. In August 2014, the US-backed Somali transitional federal government launched Operation "Indian Ocean" to eliminate the Al Shabaab insurgency in the Southern and Central coastal regions of the country. On September 1, 2014, Ahmed Abdi Godane (1977-2014), the (official) leader and founder of the organization, was killed⁵⁷. Since 2015, Al-Shabaab has withdrawn from major cities, focusing on rural areas, where it has continued to operate.

6.5. Oil, pirates and geopolitics

Crude oil must not be left out of the picture. Though Somalia is not registered as an oil-exporting state, after new oil-fields were discovered by Australians in Puntland, large companies such as CONOCO, AGIP and AMOCO invested huge sums in leasing hydrocarbon reserves on Somali territory⁵⁸. Consequently, the American presence behind the scenes of the Somali civil war followed an obvious geopolitical logic and geostrategic logic. And equally logical were the attitudes of France, Russian Federation, China and Arab states, to reject American involvement in the "Somali problem".

The dissolution of the Somali state has paved the way for illicit activities and abuses, in which some local leaders and some companies and organized crime networks have been involved. The 2004 tsunami revealed a shocking event. In Somali waters, in the last decade of the last century, cans containing radioactive material and chemical waste, had been dumped. This highly toxic waste has been responsible for the occurrence, since the 1990s, of a significant number of congenital malformations, cancers and degenerative diseases among locals⁵⁹.

At the same time, fishermen under various flags poached and fished without restrictions, commercial vessels dumped waste in Somali waters, leading to the destruction of the aquatic ecosystem, declining fish production and sentencing the population to starvation. From here, the emergence of piracy was only a step away. Originally appearing as a defensive reaction to ships violating the state's maritime territory, piracy has become a social phenomenon, with wide popular acceptance, an important source of income for clans that controlled coastal areas⁶⁰.

Piracy became so common in the region, that the Gulf of Aden was nicknamed the "pirate alley", with pirates becoming, willingly or unwillingly, actors in the regional geopolitical game. An incident in 2008 publicly showed practices that, until then, at least officially, had been classified as speculation. Somali pirates captured the Ukrainian cargo ship "Faina", which was carrying 33 American tanks destined for the Darfur rebels⁶¹, revealing the less visible facets of US-China competition in East Africa and confirming Somalia's geostrategic importance.

According to the report prepared by the ICC International Maritime Bureau, in the first 6 months of 2012, 44 pirate attacks were reported in the Somali maritime space, 12 in the Red Sea and another 13 in the Gulf of Aden, resulting in the detention of 11 ships, 174 hostages, 2 sailors killed and one wounded and another 44 sailors abducted and held hostage for ransom⁶². According to the same document, the area of action of the Somali pirates stretched from the Gulf of Aden and the Southern Red Sea, to the Indian Ocean, off the Western coast of the Maldives archipelago. In return, the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation, India, China and other states mobilized naval forces to protect maritime trade routes.

Moreover, China has justified its "String of Pearls" strategy, of militarizing the Indian Ocean through a "string" of naval bases located along the coast of Eurasia and Africa, by the need to secure the sea routes of the "Silk Belt" in front of the attacks of the Somali pirates⁶³. Turkey has built a military base in Mogadishu⁶⁴, justifying its presence by the need to fight Al Shabaab terrorism and the maritime piracy. And the United States, Japan, France, Italy, Spain and, most recently, China and Saudi Arabia, have increased their military presence in the



neighboring state of Djibouti, which controls the Western shore of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, due to the need to secure the region against the attacks of the Somali pirates⁶⁵.

Although much diminished, the phenomenon of piracy in the Gulf of Aden is not fully eradicated. At present, piracy attacks are taking place along the Western coast of Africa, which tends to become the second pole of African piracy⁶⁶.

Conclusions

Somalia is a classic case of fragmentation of an ethnically, linguistically, denominationally and civilizationally homogeneous state, beneficiary of a flat relief, which favors migration and population mixing and, consequently, national unity.

Somali secessionism is generated by the convergent action of a combination of factors that potentiate the intrastate centrifugal forces, represented by:

- **Social factors:** neo-patriarchal society, clanocratic, tribal type; reduced access to education and healthcare; demographic profile specific to states dominated by underdevelopment and poverty; slipping into ultra-conservative Islam at the expense of moderate, traditional Islam, and replacing the secular Constitution with Islamic law, Shariah;

- **Economic factors:** poverty, underdevelopment, hunger, generated by the preponderance in the GDP structure of income from subsistence agriculture and informal trade; the precariousness of the road, data and energy transport infrastructure; conflicts and internal instability, which alienate potential investors; unskilled labor market, etc.;

- **Ecological factors:** massive coastal water pollution; the destruction of the hunting and fishing fund, which amplifies the effects of food crises and separatism;

- **Historical factors:** the historical conflict with Ethiopia over sovereignty over the Ogaden and Haud regions; the division of the national territory during the colonial period and the creation of the "Two Somalias", British and Italian; the interference of the two former metropolises in the internal affairs of the independent and reunified Somali state by supporting some clans against others; the transformation of the national territory into a theater of competition and confrontation between the two political blocs during the Cold

War and between the main regional players in the period after the dismantling of the Soviet Empire; the state failure followed by its transformation into a safe haven for radical Islamists from the Arabian Peninsula and a center of maritime piracy in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea;

- **Geopolitical and geostrategic factors:** the elongated shape of the country and the eccentrically located capital, which predispose to secessionism, through the unequal distribution of the *Mittelpunkt's* force of attraction over the borders; the unequal distribution of the population that enhances the grouping on the structure of clans and separatism; the exceptional geostrategic value of pivot and potential bridgehead of the geographical position in the Horn of Africa, in the immediate vicinity of the Bab el-Mandeb strategic maritime chokepoint, which exponentially amplifies the geopolitical stake of control and domination of the country; belonging to the sub-Saharan "shatterbelt", the area of geopolitical compression between the maritime, insular world and the continental world and of civilizational compression, between Christianity and Islam; the internal fracture line, between the majority Sunni Shāfi'ī population and the minority, but compact, Sunni Ḥanābilah, in the Central-Southern regions of the country.

If we were to prioritize the importance of these factors, the "time axis" indicates, at the origin and, later, throughout the geo-historical dynamics, the interference of **external factors**, in this case the colonial and neo-colonial powers, in the local geopolitical balance. Through *divide et impera* policies, these powers stimulated the fractionalization of the homogeneous ethnic, linguistic, confessional population, by exacerbating the clan identity at the expense of national identity, by undermining the national idea, generating regional partition and developing local "patriotism", tribalism, to the detriment of the national one.

The decline to extinction of the national identity, externally fed, favored the ground for conflicts. Conflicts triggered by competition between clans, for power and wealth, and amplified by external interference. Armed conflict has destroyed the economy and turned Somalia into a failed state. The government's inability to ensure the security and prosperity of its people has amplified tribalism and secessionism. This way



a vicious circle was created, in which tribalism generated the conflicts that threw the country into poverty, underdevelopment, famine, conflicts, that end up fueling tribalism. The piracy, initially generated by poverty, was exploited by the clans that control the coastal regions, in accordance with the geopolitical interests of some geostrategic players active in the region. The ultra-conservative Islamist network has found in Somalia the ideal ground for recruitment and safe-haven, with the terrorist organization Al-Shabaab being the local exponent of its armed branch.

In conclusion, Somalia is the classic example of atomizing a nation under the concentrated and concerted action of some dominant powers competing for control of the national territory, extremely valuable geopolitical and geostrategic, an action enhanced by internal collaborationism and civilizational features that predispose to secessionism through neo-patriarchy, tribalism, underdevelopment, poverty and dependence.

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