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The Somali Conflict: A Detailed Analysis of its Causes and Factors

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Abstract- The state of Somalia has been plagued with internal disputes since its independence. The use of clans and ethnic groups contributed to the rise of conflict in the country. However, several factors have contributed to the civil war and the ongoing conflict in the country. This paper analyses the different factors of conflict present in Somalia since the grant of independence. This paper does not address the history of Somalia except when it relates to the war. But it looks at the causal and contributing factors of the conflict and how it led to an escalated war. In analysing this conflict, this paper adopts the Bloomfield and Moulton model of conflict and Edward Azar's theory of Protracted Social Conflict.

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I. Introduction

In the international community, explaining one factor as the cause of war has never been enough to capture the events around the conflict. Although the notion that one factor is a cause demonstrates the presence of that factor in the conflict, it however ignores the presence of other factors. Causes of war both within and between states always stem from a list of underlying factors that have been ignored or glossed over. There is however one factor that pushes the conflict over to violence. This paper argues that the causes of ongoing conflicts in the international community is as a result of unresolved underlying factors. To resolve these conflicts, each factor has to be resolved individually. This paper uses the Somali civil war as a case study.

In answering the question of the causes of conflict, this paper uses Bloomfield and Moulton's factors of conflict. These factors are great power involvement, previous conflictual relations between sides, external relations, poor communication and information technology, political ethnicity, military and strategic factors, economic and resources, internal politics, the failure of international organizations and violent actions in the disputed areas. This paper adopts a multi-factorial approach to the study of conflict and war.

II. Theoretical Framework

To expand on conflict and study the facets of the causes, Bloomfield and Moulton created a model that breaks down the several causes of conflict into ten (10) factors: great power involvement, previous conflictual relations between sides, external relations, poor communication and information technology, political ethnicity, military and strategic factors, economic and resources, internal politics, the failure of international organizations and violent actions in the disputed areas.

This paper adopts this model as a theory of conflict which is based on the premise that conflict is dynamic in the sense of passing through some or all of a sequence of distinctive and identifiable phases of conflict.

The transition of a conflict from one phase to another is based on the interaction of the factors of conflict in the previous phase. In line with this model theory, there are three phases of conflict. The first phase is dispute, which is mostly over differences in values, religion or lifestyle between the parties involved. The first phase transitions into the second phase "conflict" with the introduction of military options. If fighting breaks out, then the conflict moves into the third phase which is hostilities. The Somalian civil war has transitioned through all phases of the conflict and this is why it has been categorised as an ongoing conflict.

In addition to the Bloomfield Moulton model is Edward Azar's theory of Protracted Social Conflict with a new interpretative framework of Transnational Conflict with regard to the presence of international actors to the Somali conflict.

III. Colonial History

Situated in the horn of Africa and with close relations with both civilization and international trade, Somalia was of great interest to European and Arabian powers. European interest began in 1939 when Britain began to use Aden as a coaling station for ships to India, and France and Italy for their coaling services as well (Mudane, 2018). When the scramble for Africa began in the 1880s, Britain, France and Italy alongside Ethiopia wanted Somalia. France received the region around Djibouti which became formally known as French Somaliland, Britain. Italy received the territory by the coast which became known as the Italian Somaliland. Britain's territory was known as the Somaliland Protectorate.

IV. Causal Factors

The causal factors of the Somali conflict which broke out in 1991 have been described differently by

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different scholars. Two major explanations on the conflict are the instrumentalist and primordialist. Primordialist argue that the Somali conflict was caused by the clan and genealogical divisions among the Somali families. Lewis (2019) argued that ancient clan rivalries will result in conflict from time to time, and the Somali society and people have been organised in clans which have been hostile to each other (Mudane, 2018). Clanism in itself could be used either as a unifying or divisive factor. But the use of this system by the colonial powers and military administration was for division and this resulted in dispute and distrust among the clans. Hence the argument that the clan system alone led to the civil war is weak.

On the other side of this argument is the instrumentalist argument, scholars who disagree with Lewis's discourse. Samatar and Samatar argue that the cause of the Somali conflict are "the disintegration of political institutions and the resulting chaos and insecurity" (1995).This argument seems to be the closest to traditional international relations. It is assumed that there are main actors in and outside the country that are responsible for the destruction of order in Somalia and have used clanism as a means of exploitation for their private interests (Menkhaus, 2003).

There are several other arguments on the cause of the Somali civil war, some scholars explain it to be inequality, others say it is the effect of colonialism and a few explain it from the cultural and sociological view.

All of these views on the cause of the conflict are right, but each of these only analyse one aspect of the conflict. To properly understand a conflict, and its causal and contributing factors, it is required that the conflict is looked at with a whole view. This is why this paper adopts the Bloomfield Moulton model which expands the causes of conflict to ten factors all of which will be analysed in the paper. These factors include: great power involvement, previous conflictual relations between sides, external relations, poor communication and information technology, political ethnicity, military and strategic factors, economic and resources, internal politics, the failure of international organizations and violent actions in the disputed areas. Some of these factors will be more present than others, but it shows that the cause of a conflict is not as a result of an isolated cause but of multiple factors. In analysing these factors, we will be able to categorise the factors that contributed to the conflict or curbed the conflict.

a) Previous or General Relations between Sides

The sides involved in the Somali conflict include the government (status quo side) and the rebel group (non status quo side). The non-status quo side in most conflicts is often more than one though they come together to form one opposition. In Somalia, the status quo side started with the Government led by Siad Barre. Prior to the Somali war of 1991, there was the Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia which started with the Somali military's invasion of Ethiopia under the regime of Major General Siad Barre (Tareke, 2009). The aftermath of the war on Somali military and Barre's regime has been the war being described as "the greatest strategic blunder" since the country's independence (Tareke, 2009). The invasion and the war itself weakened the military and aggravated the discontent of the Somali people with Barre's regime. The first opposition group came out of this discontent. The distrust of the people for Barre worsened following his accident in 1986 at Mogadishu (Renders, 2012; Banks *et al*, 2008). Though he tried to hold on to the reins of power with a totalitarian and arbitrary system of government, the opposition in the country only grew.

In 1981, there was unrest triggered in Northern Somalia by the arrest of about 30 Isaaq clan professionals who were providing care to improve local facilities. Following this was the removal of all Isaaqs from positions of power and authority including in the military and judiciary (Nannini, 1994). This pushed the clan to rebel against the government. Barre's response to this was the genocide of up to 200,000 Isaaq tribes men and 500,000 other people.Though Barre's regime was eventually toppled, it caused damage amongst the people of Somalia which contributed to the war of 1991.

b) Great Power and Allied Movement

Prior to the Ogaden conflict, the Soviet Union was a great ally of Somalia but stopped during the conflict and shifted its support to Ethiopia. The Soviet Union sponsored economic and military aid to Somalia and this made the Barre regime dependent on the USSR. When Said came into power, he cut ties with the United States and strengthened his alliance with the Soviet Union. In 1974, he signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union (Mudane, 2018). Somalia received a massive military arsenal consisting of tanks, fighter jets, coastal batteries, bombers, and ground-to-air missiles from the Soviet Union. But when the relations between both countries weakened, Somali lost access to military and economic strength and this is evident following their defeat in the Ogaden war (Lewis, 1998).

After the break in relationship between the Soviet Union and Somalia, Barre sought for a new alliance and settled with the United States, rival to the Soviet Union. The United States stepped in and provided the country with military aid which rebuilt Somalia's military strength. The country has always been dependent on great powers and this causes a strain in military, economic and social powers wehn said great power withdraws its support.

c) General External Relations

A major external affair that contributed to Somalia's conflict was the Ogaden military conflict between 1977 and 1978. The conflict which was

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territorial over Ogaden began when Somalia invaded Ethiopia. A major ally of Somalia, Soviet Union, disapproved of the invasion and ceased its support for Somalia and started to support Ethiopia (Mudane, 2018). Somalia was defeated in the war as Ethiopia received military supplies worth over $1 billion and the arrival of 12,000 Cuban soldiers sent by Fidel Castro (Clodfelter, 2017). By January 1978, the Ethiopians and Cubans had begun to push the Somalis out of Ogaden and by March, had recaptured almost all of the territory (Clodfelter, 2017; Tareke, 2000). Half of the Somali air force was destroyed and over a third of the soldiers were killed. The war left the military force of Somalia in shambles which led to a revolt that broke out into war.

d) International Organisations

The role of international organisations is to maintain peace and order in conflicts, but sometimes, the oppositions see these as a threat to their activities. Following the collapse of Somalia's central government, the United Nations created the United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM 1) to provide relief to the people and restore order (Rutherford, 2008; Interpeace, 2009). In 1992, the UNSC Resolution 794 was passed and approved a coalition of UN peacekeepers led by the United States to stabilise the situation in Somalia and this started the two years of United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II). These operations recorded some success in the country, though in 1995, the UN soldiers withdrew after incurring more casualties (Rutherford, 2008). The military clashes after this were more localised as the UN military intervention did curb intense fighting in the region.

The UN missions contained the war but new uprisings arose between political parties. The African Union Mission in Somalia became active in 2007 with an initial mandate of six month though it is still active. The operation was mandated to support transitional governmental structures, implement a national security plan, train the Somali forces and assist in creating a secure environment (UNSC, 2007).

e) Ethnicity

In Somalia, the Somalis ethnic groups are best described in clans. Clanism was a major political resource and Siad Barre made use of this in his regime. The clans are patrilineal and divided into subclans. There are five clans categorised as noble- Hawiye, Dir, Darod, Isaaq and Rahanweyn (Lewis and Samatar, 1999).

In the 1980s, Barre filled all important positions in his cabinet and the security forces with members of the three Darood clans- Marehan, Dhulbahante and Ogaden- which were closely related to his clan, reer. Sources state that some tank brigades which are made up of 540 officers had 500 Marehan and were led by a Marehan officer (Compagnon, 1992). The colonels and generals were also part of the president's inner caucus, hence were loyal to him and his relatives (Adam, 1998). This watered down the perception of the Somali army and they were seen mainly as Barre's personal army (Compagnon, 1992). With this approach, Siad had the support of these clans. Though it could be said that only the leaders were his supporters, these leaders could influence the decision of their followers.

f) Military

Prior to independence, the Trust Territory of Somalia (former colony of Italy) established a national army to protect the borders of the republic. Shortly after, British Somaliland gained independence and five days after, Trust Territory of Somaliland followed suit (Robinson, 2016). After independence, both regions merged to form Somali Republic and created the Somali National Army with 5000 officers (the army recorded exponential growth quickly). The officers were trained in the United Kingdom, Egypt and Italy and the first commander was Colonel Daud Abdulle Hirsi (Metz, 1993).

Though the force benefited economically and socially, it began to experience a downgrade only a few years after. the force was plagued with political controversy and clan dispute (Robinson, 2016). There were internal disputes between northern and southern commissioned officers, and though it was resolved, dissatisfaction lingered with the northern side (Walls and Kibble, 2010; Metz, 1993). The true test for the army started in 1964 when Somali guerrillas started an insurgency in Ethiopia. Though the Somalian government refused to support this, the army launched their attacks when the Ethiopian force sent reinforcements to the Ogaden. At the end of the conflict, only about half of the Somali National Army survived the war. Following the broken alliance with the Soviet Union, Barre and his administration settled on an alliance with the United States from whom they received extensive military support.

Clanism was very present in Somalia especially under Barre's regime as he used this as a resource. Siad Barre filled prominent positions in his administration including in the army with members of Darood clans which was related to his clan, reer (New People Media Centre, 2005; Makinda, 2016).

Prior to the war, 1990, the International Institute for Strategic Studies estimated that the army comprised four corps and 12 divisions, 45 mechanised and infantry brigades commando brigades, one surface-to-air missile brigade, three field artillery brigades, 30 field battalions and one air defence artillery battalion. The size of the armed forces was about 65,000 though it was reduced later that year (Metz, 1993; Robinson, 2019).

g) Internal Politics

Following the defeat in Ogaden, Siad Barre's popularity plummeted and discontent arose within his generals. This led to an attempted coup in 1978.

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Though some of the plotters were executed, those who escaped formed the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, the force that toppled Barre from power. In 1986, Siad Barre suffered severe injuries from a car crash and his Vice President Lt-Gen Mohamed Ali Samatar stood in his stead (Lewis, 2019). This crash and his poor health caused speculations about his leadership. To hold on to power, Barre and his ruling party Supreme Revolutionary Council became totalitarian and this resulted in more opposition.

Resistance grew in the country supported by Ethiopia's Derg administration. To curb these insurrections, Siad implemented the use of force. In 1981, the unrest was triggered in the North by the arrest of 30 Isaaq professionals and this was followed by the systemic removal of Isaaqs from positions of power. Barre then signed a treaty with Ethiopia's Leader Mengistu Haile Mariam to cease hosting insurgencies of one another. The Somali National Movement was triggered by this and launched attacks which the government responded to with human rights violations. These internal fights have greatly contributed to the civil war.

h) Economic and Resources

One of the legacies of Siad Barre and the Ogaden war was the economic deprivation in the country. Because all political positions were occupied by friends and relatives, there was direct access to embezzlement of public funds, and corruption in the administration (Compagnon, 1992). With the absolute power that he had, Barre operated a dictatorship and had access to all spoils in the country. The embezzlement of funds meant that the population lacked social amenities and access to wealth, thus deepening the economic crisis in the country. This increased the level of violence and extortion that displaced the people of the North and caused an uprising in the South. By 1990, the country was already bankrupt and experiencing food shortage. Crime became the way to sustain daily livelihood

i) Communication and Information

j) Action in Disputed Areas

The Somali conflict is not a territorial conflict, hence there was no disputed area between both sides.

V. Conclusion

Although some factors are more present than others, the Somali conflict is a great example to demonstrate that state conflicts are not caused by one factor but several. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2016) describe conflict as a universal feature of human society that takes its origin from several factors including economic differentiation, social change, cultural change, and formation, psychological development and political differentiation.

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