

The Causes and Consequences of State Failure in Somalia

By Adam Muse Jibril

The chronic political crisis in Somalia that led to the failure of the state-building project stems from historically related reasons that are predominantly internally driven. This failure began with a lack of conceptual understanding of the historical origins and significance of the state itself among the Somali political elites, resulting in a lack of awareness about how to address it. From the very beginning, the Somali political elites did not pay sufficient attention to the fact that the modern state structures left by colonial powers originally belonged to highly developed societies; thus, they were entirely alien entities imposed on Hargeisa and Mogadishu from Europe.

As soon as the colonial staff returned to Europe, the state institutions deteriorated into simple structures devoid of soul and heart. This degeneration can be likened to a Somali she-camel: “Let us milk our she-camel.” Aan Maalo Hasheenna Maandeeqee. Here, the state was perceived merely as a resource to exploit, without proper management or care. The ethos of modern state management remained with those who had successfully modernized their societies—an outcome of European civilization guided by the great revolutions: the Enlightenment, Renaissance, Industrial, and Scientific & Technological Revolutions. In contrast, the Somali inhabited areas lingered outside the context of human civilization, guided instead by traditional value systems rooted in clannism and a political Islamic doctrine related to Wahhabism from the thirteenth century.

Political Ideologies Leading to State Failure in Somalia: For the past five decades, new generations have emerged with a religious worldview based on Wahhabism, advocating for a transformation of Somali society—not toward the interests of a Somali nation-state or modernization, but for a backward-looking revival of an Islamic caliphate by building an Islamic Emirate in the Horn of Africa. Both political clannism and various Wahhabi organizations flourished under the autocratic military regime, which claimed Marxism while suppressing Islamic rituals and exploiting clannism to attain absolute control over society. When the regime eventually collapsed and the need to establish a Somali state became pressing, the entire Somali political arena was dominated by only two archaic ideologies: clannism and political Islam. This occurred due to a lack of an enlightened political elite and a modern middle class capable of promoting progressive political ideas.

As a result, the political elites—both clannish and Islamist—lacked a nationally oriented policy agenda, causing the country to become entrenched in a cycle of violence throughout South-central Somalia. This cycle has persisted from the City State of Ali Mahdi in 1991 to the current violence and culture of corruption under Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud. Consequently, there is no space for consensus-based conflict resolution, nor is there any interest in a state-building political orientation. (In contrast, the Puntland regional state has generally maintained peace, largely because the Majeerteen clans there have a traditional system that allows for conflict resolution through clan-based consensus management, which can curb the influence of greedy politicians.)

The tragic failure of the state-building project by the Mogadishu elite has led to countless foreign powers filling the resultant vacuum of statelessness. With no serious and sincere Somali politicians to guide them, these foreign powers have been able to determine the fate of war and peace in the country. The internal sources for state-building capacities have been undermined by corrupt Somali politicians, whose

policies are designed to disrupt the harmony and unity of Somali political life through clannish agendas. This has also involved the cancellation of rights related to power and resource sharing among political actors, reflecting a desperate internal condition unprepared to fulfill the task of building state institutions.

This internal failure was a significant setback for the components of the state-building project, creating conditions favorable for betrayal of the national cause at the expense of foreign interventions. By intentionally ignoring the political role and rights of Somali partners in the federal state, antagonizing Somaliland, and inviting various military alliances, the internal consensus has been undermined. This has placed President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud in a quagmire full of contradictions, where his erratic and hasty decisions have fostered a favorable environment for Somaliland's close cooperation with Ethiopia within the IGAD regional framework. Furthermore, the continuation of such counterproductive policies will likely lead Puntland and other regions, such as South-West and Jubbaland, to feel compelled to follow Somaliland's example.

Moreover, the critical dilemma President Hassan faces is his dependence on Egyptian troops to maintain his hold on power, which stands in stark contrast to the experiences of the past three decades regarding the numerous attempts at state-building in Somalia. The international community has flocked to Mogadishu to assist in the state-building processes, involving billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of military personnel in one of the largest and most expensive peace-imposing campaigns, which have tragically failed to achieve either peace or state-building.

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