



HISTORICAL SECURITY COUNCIL: Topic 2

THE SITUATION IN SOMALIA, 1991

Background:

While Somalia is ethnically, religiously, and linguistically homogeneous, the country's population is divided into clans who can draw their lineage back to different ancestors. During the colonial period under Italy and Great Britain, clans became a central feature of state administration and political competition. Colonial administrators established a patrimonial system of resource distribution, employed tactics of divide and rule along clan lines, and engaged in collective punishment of clans. All of these tactics would be employed during later periods of violence. Somalia gained independence after a ten-year period under a UN Trusteeship from 1950 to 1960. The northern and southern regions were united under multi-party democracy that lasted from 1960 to 1969.

In 1969, a bloodless coup resulted in the installment of President Siad Barre. Up until 1991, Somalia became ruled by the Democratic Republic. Barre was proclaimed ruler of the country after the 1969 coup d'état that overthrew the Somali Republic following the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. Barre's Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) military junta reconstituted Somalia as a one-party Marxist-Leninist communist state. Renaming the country as the Somali Democratic Republic, and adopting scientific socialism, Somalia had obtained support from a European ally: the Soviet Union.

From 1969 to 1978, the Barre Regime enjoyed relative popularity and financial support from both the Soviet Union and Western institutions. After a number of initial victories in a war against its neighbor, the Soviet Union withdrew support from Somalia in favor of Ethiopia, and Somalia lost the war in 1978. Discontent with this, the Siad Barre regime began to spread after the military loss against Ethiopia. In an effort to maintain power, Barre's rule became increasingly totalitarian and arbitrary, causing opposition to his government to grow. In order to reduce this potential threat, Barre relied more and more on his inner circle, exploiting historical clan animosities, and removing appeals to unity and nationalism. In 1977 Somalia entered the Ethio-Somalia or Ogaden war with Ethiopia. A number of resistance movements supported by Ethiopia's communist Derg administration had multiplied across the nation. In response, Barre ordered punitive measures against those perceived to be aiding the guerilla movement, including the bombing of cities. Siad Barre's presidential brigade, the Red Berets, was responsible for civilian executions, genocides, and mass atrocities in and around Mogadishu.



Current Situation, 1991:

By January 1991, after consistent fighting against Barre's regime, the United Somali Congress (USC) rebels defeated the Red Berets, toppling Barre's control over the government. After this victory, other rebel groups declined to work with the USC, and each drew support from its own constituency. Among these opposition groups were the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) and Somali Democratic Alliance (SDA). Subsequently, these groups began competing for influence in the power vacuum that followed the removal of Barre's government. The Somali National Movement declared an independent Republic of Somaliland in the region that had constituted the British Somaliland before independence and unification. As Barre fled, the 'external' branch of the USC declared Ali Mahdi Mohamed president. The "internal" branch of the USC led by General Mohamed Farah Aydeed contested this decision, and civil war between the two factions enveloped Mogadishu shortly after Barre's departure, with significant civilian casualties as a result of heavy artillery being used within the confines of a densely populated urban environment. While some of the fatalities were undoubtedly accidental, Amnesty International reports the intentional shelling of neighborhoods known to be associated with opposing factions. In the absence of a central government, Somalia became a "failed state".

Important bloc positions:

- **United States and its allies:** Following war with Ethiopia in the 1970s, Somalia began turning toward the West, including the United States, for international support and military equipment. Although the United States never formally severed diplomatic relations with Somalia, the U.S. Embassy in Somalia was closed in 1991. From 1992-94, the United States took part in operations that aimed to provide assistance to Somalis. Numerous efforts at mediation and reconciliation were attempted over the years. However, the US was not willing to directly intervene in a foreign conflict at this time.
- **Soviet Union and its allies:** These countries are against USC's involvement, and oppose the overthrow of the previous communist dictatorship in Somalia. During the Ogaden War, the USSR disapproved of Somalia's invasion of Ethiopia. Having then supported Ethiopia, Somalia lost the war, which further aggravated public discontent against the Barre regime.

Possible solutions:

- Sending UN peacekeepers to deliver humanitarian aid to prevent heavy loss of life, destruction to property.
- Implementing an arms embargo on Somalia to ensure regional peace and stability.
- Establish a ceasefire, withdraw militants, and implement UN authorities in the area to end hostilities between factions.
- Establishment of a democratic government.



Further reading:

- <https://www.britannica.com/place/Somalia/Civil-war> - Somalia Civil War | Britannica
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094503> - Somalia country profile | BBC
- <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1992/somalia/> - Somalia | Human Rights Watch
- <https://www.c-r.org/accord/somalia/endless-war-brief-history-somali-conflict> - Conciliation Resources
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-io_RfLBpgc Somalia: The Forgotten Story | Al Jazeera World

Bibliography:

- "Somali Civil War - Wikipedia". 2021. *En.Wikipedia.Org*. Accessed November 9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somali_Civil_War.
- "Somalia: Fall Of Siad Barre And The Civil War | Mass Atrocity Endings". 2021. *Sites.Tufts.Edu*. Accessed November 9. <https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/somalia-fall-of-siad-barre-civil-war/>.
- "UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA I (UNOSOM I) - Background (Summary)". 2021. *Peacekeeping.Un.Org*. Accessed November 9. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unsom1backgr1.html>.