Term paper on Somali conflict roots and peace building

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15 March, 2009
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Executive summary

Conflict is unavoidable. It can obliterate and it can create. Both danger and opportunity are available in a conflict situation, but the result obtained depends on the management and resolution of the conflict. The consequence of the conflict depends on how each party react to the negative and emotional charges of the situation, and the third party role could be critical. With skilled intervention, conflict has the potential of developing better communication, more effective solutions, and greater empathy.

Conflict has the potential of developing better communication, more effective solutions, and greater empathy. But Somali case of conflict is different, which has been twisted last twenty years.

Somalia has suffered protracted oppression and violence at the hands of their fellow Somalis. They have been living in hard and harsh conditions since after they took over their independence from Italy colonial. On the other hand, they lived callous under both democratic and military regimes. During the democratic era and the following governments, both civil governments and Siad Bare’s authoritarian government had failed to meet people’s expectations. Poverty increased and security deteriorated. Moreover, corruption, favouritism and cronyism characterized state institutions.

Although people of Somalia hailed when Siad Bare took power by in October 1969 by bloody coup, but only made the situation worse. As a result of the previous wars and war related causes, hundreds of thousands of Somalis lost their lives, and many more became displaced internally and externally. In this paper, I will attempt to answer the following three questions: What are the causes of the Somali conflict? What explains the perpetuation of the civil war in the west of Somalia, or the failure of previous peace efforts?

Although Somali conflicts have multiple and complex causes including political, economical, cultural, and clan based interests, but always there have been various external and internal actors which have played different roles during the range of stages of the conflict. Competition for power and resources is the most significant factor that has created and continued the clan-based conflicts.

This paper will elucidate why and precise reasons that protracted Somali conflict, and failing peace effort attempts done by international communities.

Somali conflict has not begun after collapsed of former Somali state, but in history, particularly before shifted to modern life or urban life, Somali clans had often clashed over resources such as water, livestock (camels) and grazing zones long before Somalia became a sovereign country. However, those types of resources that are needed and the means used to obtain them have changed by the new life. Political leaders realized that whoever controlled the state would control the nation’s resources. So current conflict is based previous conflicts. In addition, Somali people who live nomadic way used widely accepted Somali traditional legal system (Xeer), historically traditional leaders settled these conflicts in any way they preferred, and see as easiest way for resolving conflicts. In
contrast there were not international and external actors who intruded rural people’s domestic conflicts.

This paper argues that long-standing causes of the Somali conflict are over power, resources, the colonial legacy and state oppression. I will also discuss on my term paper that clan identity, the availability of weapons and the existence of unemployed youth have exacerbated Somali conflicts. Because, identity is just a guise for the elites’ hunt of power and economic interests, which is most based Somali conflict roots.

**Causes of the Somali conflict**

The Somali conflicts have multiple and complex causes including political, economical, cultural, and clan based interests. Various external and internal actors have played different roles during the range of stages of the conflict. Based on recorded history observations, the root causes of the Somali conflict were competition for resources and/or power, a repressive state and the colonial legacy. It can also regard as contributing causes the politicized clan identity, the availability of weapons, the large numbers of unemployed youth, and certain aspects of the Somali culture that sanction the use of violence. Somali people have perceptions that bring about change only in violence manner.

The most significant factor that has created and continued the clan-based conflicts is competition for power and resources. As History in this area suggests and the collective memories of the Somalis attest, Somali clans had often clashed over resources such as water, livestock (camels) and grazing zones long before Somalia became a sovereign country. Using the widely accepted Somali traditional legal system (Xeer), historically traditional leaders settled these conflicts in any way they preferred, and see as easiest way for resolving conflicts.

However, after Somalia get its independence, many Somalis moved to urban areas, so types of resources that are needed and the means used to obtain them have changed. Political leaders realized that whoever controlled the state would control the nation’s resources. Access to government resources, recruitment of civil servants and control of foreign aid replaced control of water wells and access to grazing issues in the countryside. For instance, Muse Bihi Abdi, SNM veteran told us one day and revealed in his presentation he conducted in the class that more than 70 per cent (51 out of 71) of police-station chiefs were members of the same clan as the then police chief. Moreover, the police chief was just one example of how government officials were misusing their power. Besides the political patronage appointments that characterized the civil service, corruption affected all levels and departments of the government.

Look at this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>power positions</th>
<th>Total of positions</th>
<th>Somalia south</th>
<th>North Somalia/Somaliland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governors</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since elites from specific clans (Darood) controlled all levers of state power and the economy, the leadership of the opposition capitalized on this opportunity.

The system did not allow opposition forces to exist, let alone have a voice in important issues. When, in 1978, some military officers attempted to overthrow the military regime, the Siad Barre government used the national army and police to punish civilian members of the Isaaq, and restricted their commercial and business industries.

The military then was involved in the killing of civilians, mass abuses and the destruction of areas inhabited by that Isaaq clan, although Majeerteen clan opposed one time against Bare’s system, and eventually become his extreme loyalist, but Isaaq was only clan which refused to be loyal to the Bare’s cruel system.

In 1981 some politicians of the Isaaq clan established an opposition movement (the Somali National Movement, SNM) in London, England. Again, the military government started to punish civilians. During SNM’s armed struggle against the military regime, Siad Barre regime had committed crime against humanity in major Somaliland towns, Hargeisa Bura’o, and Berbera. Murdered, rape young girls, and tortured many innocent civilians and respected elders. In 1988-1990 after SNM mostly destroyed Bare’ Regime, lot of armed function emerged in the south Somalia and ignited new type of conflict, which is based on power and resources, and it is really difficult to end until now. There is lot of actors that protracted Somali conflict including Ethiopia, Arab governments, and Western countries.

**What protracted Somali conflicts and failure peace efforts?**

Fifteen peace conferences have been held in different cities at different times. Five of these (Djibouti 1991, Addis Ababa 1993, Cairo 1997, Arta 2000 and Eldoret/Mpepigi 2002-2004-2009 in Djibouti) were major conferences to which the international community lent its support. In 2009 no one can predict this 15th peace conference will be successful. Because there is not yet proper transforming conflict which conducted by this conference. Each produced sort of peace agreement and a new government. However, all of the agreements failed except for the recently concluded Djibouti (Maamul-wadaag) conference, which have been immediately facing serious challenges. Why is making peace among Somali factions so difficult? Why, whenever they sign a new peace accord does not work? Why do they fail to implement it?

Downs and Stedman, two leading scholars in this field, have identified eight determinants that affect the implementation of peace accords, namely “the number of warring parties; the lack of either a peace agreement before intervention or a coerced peace agreement; the likelihood of spoilers; a collapsed state; the number of soldiers; the presence of disposable natural resources; the presence of hostile neighbouring states or networks.

All above mentioned factors, and others peculiar to this conflict, are present in the Somalia case. However, I will limit my argument to the four most important factors: two
external and two domestic, because all those factors continue to haunt the Somali peace process.

Ethiopia’s meddling is the most important and persistent factor in the perpetuation of the Somali conflict. This meddling has given shelter and arms to all spoilers (groups and individuals). It has undermined the 15th peace important peace accords. In other words, Ethiopia, a powerful and well-positioned state, is a hostile neighbour that aims to maintain a weak Somali state, which they want to exploit for their regional, international, and resource interests. Secondly, Western and Arab countries have crucial role, which protracted Somali conflicts, and retreat peace accords. Ideology of those actors (western countries, and Arab countries) for building of Somali state is widely different; subsequently they have negative involvement of the Somali peace processes. They want to see in horn of Africa a Somali government which will be pro-Arab, pro western, or favour to the Ethiopian interests in the horn of Africa or to keep up Ethiopian’s status on the desk of African nations.

On the other hand, domestic factors are both have related to the above mentioned external actors. For instance, there are two main domestic factors; one part which wants Islamic government and other part want moderate country. Those are as well widely different and difficult to have centre for common interest and common agreement, because each one there is actor behind it.

Conclusion

In this term paper I outlined the background causes of the Somali conflict. I argued that conflict over power and resources, the colonial legacy and state oppression were the long-standing causes of the Somali conflict. I also mentioned that clan identity, the availability of weapons and the existence of unemployed youth have exacerbated Somali conflicts. While we recognised the importance of clan identity within Somali society, I argue that the politicization of this identity is just a guise for the elites’ hunt of power and economic interests.

In addition I have identified the main factors that have sustained the conflict for more than decade. I emphasised to argue that Ethiopia’s hostile policy toward Somalia, the warlords’ lack of interest in peace, Somalia’s meagre resources and the absence of major-power interest are the major factors that have plagued peace efforts in Somalia.

I believe that Somalia’s protracted conflict has multiple and complex causes. The combination of external intervention, the elites’ greed and the people’s legitimate grievances resulted in an all-out war. Since the synergy of factors and actors I have given clue in this paper are too numerous, we believe that comprehensive strategies that deal with all of them at different stages are necessary for creating a durable peace in Somalia.
Sources:


2. 1 I M Lewis, Modern history of the Somali: Revised, updated


