

# Research Project

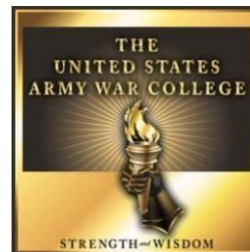
# Somalia: An Analysis of Social Fit

by

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### Abstract

After 30 years of international effort to stabilize Somalia, the country remains in conflict with an entrenched Islamist insurgency. While very real concerns over Al Shabaab's association with Al Qaeda remain at the forefront of US policy in Somalia, the conflict appears no closer to resolution. Since 1991 external states sponsored countless reconciliation conferences to try and establish governance in Somalia. None have succeeded. Ancient societies, particularly societies comprised of pastoral nomadic tribes, often maintain local governance customs, religious customs, cultures, and structures that do not fit neatly into western notions of stable governance. Hierarchical structures, complex multi-echeloned institutions, and bureaucratic systems of justice potentially fuel resistance, competition, and violent conflict. Ideally, the crafting of a political and social order into effective governance requires the acceptance of the governed. Utilizing the framework of Social Fit, this paper assesses the social and cultural factors that contribute to the Somali conflict to illuminate potential implications for US policy makers.

# **Somalia: An Analysis of Social Fit**

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## **I. Introduction**

After 30 years of international effort to stabilize Somalia, the country remains in conflict with an entrenched Islamist insurgency. While the Federal Government of Somalia continues efforts to establish stability and govern, it faces continuous internal competition from federal states, clan leadership, religious leaders, and Al Shabaab. While very real concerns over Al Shabaab's association with Al Qaeda remain at the forefront of US policy in Somalia, the conflict appears no closer to resolution. In fact, according to the Fragile States Index by the Fund for Peace, Somalia ranks 178 out of 179 countries- the second most fragile state in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Since the ouster of Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991 external states sponsored over 17 reconciliation conferences to broker a negotiated settlement and establish governance in Somalia.<sup>2</sup> None have succeeded. Clan infighting, disfunction between the Federal Government and the member states, the role of political Islam in society, and splinter violent extremist groups all contribute to the continuous cycle of violence. At the heart, each group is competing, influencing, and fighting for the right to establish rules for Somali society and the power to enforce them. External pressure from outside actors with their own agendas further complicates the situation. Utilizing the framework of Social Fit, this paper assesses the social and cultural causes of the Somali conflict to illuminate potential implications for US policy makers.

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<sup>1</sup> (2022). "Country Dashboard | Fragile States Index." from <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>.

<sup>2</sup> Elmi, A. A. (2010). Understanding the Somalia conflagration : identity, political Islam and peacebuilding. London, New York, Oxford, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

## **A. Research Question**

Ancient societies, particularly societies comprised of pastoral nomadic tribes, often maintain local governance customs, religious customs, cultures, and structures that do not fit neatly into western notions of stable governance. Hierarchical structures, complex multi-echeloned institutions, and bureaucratic systems of justice potentially fuel resistance, competition, and violent conflict. How might the application of the Social Fit Framework, to the circumstance in Somalia, point the U.S. to a better policy for a more stable and peaceful Somalia?

## **II. Somalia**

### **A. Historical Context**

The present-day challenges facing the Somali state are rooted in the historical evolution of Somali society. The role of Islam, colonialism, and clan dynamics all provide insight into the causes of conflict today. This section provides a brief history of Somali society to provide context for further analysis using the Social Fit framework.

The role of Islam in Somali society traces back to its introduction to the region in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. From the 7<sup>th</sup> century through the collapse of the Ajuran & Adal Sultanates in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Muslim Sultanates governed Somalia according to Islamic law.<sup>3</sup> Never fully united as one nation state, the Sultanates fragmented toward the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century into clan Sultanates. Despite the fragmentation, Islam continued to play a vital role in Somali society providing a basis of order and conflict resolution for the clans.

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<sup>3</sup> Abdullahi, A. (2017). Making Sense of Somali History. London, UNITED KINGDOM, Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd.

Somali scholars credit Islam with the transformation of Somali society from a pastoral nomadic society to settled communities, where Islam superseded clan affiliation. As noted by Somali scholar Abdurahman Abdullahi, Islam laid the foundation for reorientation of the society regarding its world view, identity, and hierarchy of values by providing a blueprint of total order.<sup>4</sup>

Leading into the colonial era, Somali society organized itself around a system of indigenous governments that incorporated family clans, Sultanates, and rudimentary city states.<sup>5</sup> The continued propagation of Islam provided a baseline of Somali societal values, but political loyalty rested on the individual's family clan.<sup>6</sup> In effect, Islamic influence merged with traditional clan structure and Somalis exercised self-governance along familial lines. Within the clans, elders earned leadership positions through respect and demonstrated wisdom, and political decisions were made democratically internal to the clan. Despite shared ethnicity, language and religion, on the eve of colonialism Somalia was not a nation state, but rather a collection of clans that exercised political power at the local level. The decentralized nature by which Somali society functioned appeared disjointed and exploitable by colonial powers.

In 1884 Colonial powers conducted a conference in Berlin on the colonization of Africa. Since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, European interest in further expansion into Africa increased. As a result of the conference, Great Britain, Italy, and France agreed to partition Somalia. In establishing control of their respective colonies, the Europeans adopted a "divide-and-rule policy," which pitted indigenous groups

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>5</sup> Njoku, R. C. (2013). The history of Somalia, ABC-CLIO.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 80.

against one another through control of resources.<sup>7</sup> Ensuring indigenous groups remained at odds with one another facilitated European control and prevented groups from uniting in rebellion against the respective colonial authorities.

During the establishment of control by the three European powers, it is important to note the role Ethiopia played in the partition of Somali lands. Ethiopia, a landlocked country, desired the Ogaden region of Somalia to give it access to the Indian Ocean through Somali territory.<sup>8</sup> In the late 1890s a series of agreements between the Ethiopians and the three European powers effectively partitioned Somalia into five regions. The French established French Somaliland in the north around the port of Djibouti, the British occupied British Somaliland in the northeast and portions of the southern border areas of the British Kenyan colony, the Italians occupied the eastern coastal areas, and the Ethiopians occupied the interior Ogaden region.

The colonial period from 1900 through 1960 saw varying degrees of governance across the five partitions of Somali. Each protectorate used different techniques to maintain control. Scholars differ in their opinions about Somali resistance during the early part of colonial rule. Some contend that the early resistance by Somalis was not tied to a greater desire to regain their autonomy, but in response to the local treatment by colonial authorities. Others posit that the roots of future nationalism were present in the early uprisings. The most famous uprising against the Ethiopians and British in the Ogaden region was the Dervish movement led by Sheik Muhammad Abdille Hassan. Hassan, referred to by the British as the “Mad Mullah,” united Somalis in the Ogaden region by establishing a ruling council of Islamic and clan leaders that resulted in a multi

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 50.



clan Islamic movement.<sup>9</sup> Hassan called for a restoration of government according to Islamic law and the removal of foreigners from Somali lands. Hassan's followers, known as the Dervishes, waged a bloody war that eventually spread over much of Northern Somalia from 1899 to 1920 and resulted in the death of almost one third of the population in Northern Somalia.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, the death of Hassan brought an end to the rebellion. Many Somalis view the Dervish rebellion as the birth of modern-day Somali Nationalism.

During the years leading up to World War II the British viewed British Somaliland as a resource of livestock to feed its garrison in Aden and invested little in terms of development in the region. The British allowed the continuation of intraclan administrative processes, and only interceded when the threat of violence arose between clans. The Italians instituted a comprehensive plan of development in Italian Somaliland that included large scale development projects and the introduction of fascism to the protectorate.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, scholars note that the British approach appeared more successful than the Italians in maintaining order and preventing uprisings, however the disparate efforts between the British and the Italians in infrastructure and institutional development would later haunt Somalia as it moved towards independence. Somali historian Abdurahman Abdullahi characterizes the

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<sup>9</sup> Chapin Metz, H. (1992). *Somalia: A Country Study*. Washington, Library of Congress. 13-15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Mukhtar, M. H. (1996). "The Plight of the Agro-Pastoral Society of Somalia." Review of African Political Economy **23**(70): 543-553.

period of 1923-1940 as Italian Fascist rule in southern Somalia with ambitious projects and harsh practices.<sup>12</sup>

As the Italians wrestled for total control and implementation of fascism, the Governor issued an order for all Somalis to turn in their weapons. In response to Governor's order to disarm, Sheik Hassan Barsane convened a meeting of elders and began what became known as the Barsane Revolt. Barsane responded to the order saying, "Your government has its laws, and we have ours. Our law is the law of Allah and his Prophet. If you come to fight against us, we will fight you with all available means. It is better to die while defending our laws."<sup>13</sup> The Barsane revolt serves as one of numerous examples of Somali resistance in the Italian protectorate.

During the initial stages of World War II, and because of the Italians declaration of war on the United Kingdom in 1940, the British began operations against the Italians in East Africa and quickly defeated them. By early 1941 the British established a military administration over Somalia. For the first time in Somalia's colonial experience, most of Somalia fell under one administration. The French maintained French Somaliland and the Kenyans retained a portion of Somali land in the Northern Frontier District. The British Military administration returned a portion of the Ogaden region to Ethiopia in 1941 but continued the work of colonial civil service over Somalia's two primary protectorates from 1941-1949.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Abdullahi, A. (2017). Making Sense of Somali History. London, UNITED KINGDOM, Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd.

<sup>13</sup> Mukhtar, 545.

<sup>14</sup> Chapin Metz, 16.

In 1947 following World War II, the four powers referred disposition of Italian colonies in Africa to the newly formed United Nations, and the United Nations determined the colonies would be placed under international trusteeships for a period of ten years at which time the colonies would be granted independence.<sup>15</sup> The United Nations also stripped Italy of all its colonial claims in Africa to include Somalia. It is worth noting that during deliberations in determining what to do with the former Italian colonies, the British Foreign Secretary for State for the Colonies advocated among the four powers for unification of all Somali lands under one government, including Somali lands in French Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Kenya.<sup>16</sup> His recommendation was ignored. Then in 1950 the United Nations Advisory Council, recognizing the need to prepare Somali for independence, brought the Italians back into Somalia to administer its former colony. Under the trusteeship, known as the Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia (AFIS), the Italians regained administering authority over their portion of Somalia to prepare the Somalis for independence and statehood.<sup>17</sup> In 1952, Robert Gavin, of the UN International Labor Office, traveled to Somalia to assist Somaliland authorities under the Italian trusteeship with solving labor issues in preparation for Somali independence. Gavin described the challenges facing Somali independence as “1) there exists no indigenous social or political structure upon which an independent state can be built; 2) the nomadic life of four-fifths of the population makes any form of strong centralized authority on a national or even local basis difficult to achieve; and 3)

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<sup>15</sup> Gavin, R. (1952). Economic and Social Conditions in Somaliland Under Italian Trusteeship, International Labour Review 66.

<sup>16</sup> Njoku, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

there is almost universal illiteracy, lack of knowledge of elementary agricultural or industrial techniques, and widespread contempt for the economic and social values which are the foundations upon which the modern democratic state is built.”<sup>18</sup>

Complicating matters further, similar conditions described by Gavin existed in northern British Somaliland.

Under the UN trusteeship and with a ten-year deadline to establish Somali independence, the Italians immediately began the process of improving infrastructure, administration, and raising the standard of living; while the British lagged far behind in development and failed to start preparations for independence until 1958.<sup>19</sup> At the time of independence the British protectorate and the Italian trusteeship functioned under distinctly separate legal, educational, and economic systems. Despite shared ethnicity, language, religion, and growing nationalist sentiment, these differences would hamper the unification of the Somali protectorate and trusteeship in its early days.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960, the British Protectorate, and the Italian Trusteeship united to form the Republic of Somalia. As with most all post-colonial nations, Somalian independence did not come without challenges to the political order. Initially, the fledgling state began its political journey as a democracy led by President Daar and Prime Minister Shermarke. Though united under one government, the country continued to function as two separate states with different British and Italian administrative systems. As noted by Abdurahman Abdullahi, “the hasty application of the alien model of democracy in a tradition-bound society brought about clan conflict,

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<sup>18</sup> Gavin, 221.

<sup>19</sup> Fawole, W. A. (2018). The Illusion of the Post-Colonial State : Governance and Security Challenges in Africa. Lanham, Lexington Books.

political anarchy, and immeasurable political turmoil.”<sup>20</sup> Complicating matters, as a democracy, two separate democratic systems existed, one for the rural nomadic population where representatives were selected through Xeer Clan councils and one for urban citizens where more Western direct elections were held.<sup>21</sup> Scholars note two competing interests during this period, a rise in nationalism and a retreat to traditional based clan politics.

Somali Nationalism did not awaken suddenly but grew slowly over time. In 1943 political parties remained banned by the British Military Administration (BMA) in Somalia, however, the BMA did encourage freedom of expression and political awareness by tolerating social clubs and societies. The Somali Youth Club emerged initially as a social organization but became the Somali Youth League (SYL) in 1947 and dominated Somali politics through 1969.<sup>22</sup> A key tenant of the SYL platform was the idea of a greater Somalia, one in which all ethnic Somalis are united under one government, including ethnic Somalis in the Ethiopian Ogaden Region, the Kenyan Northern Frontier District, and the French Djibouti. To further its foreign policy objectives, the fledgling Somali Government broke with its colonial masters and established agreements with the Soviet Union to help build the Somali military. The Soviets provided Somalis with equipment, training, and even hosted Somali military

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<sup>20</sup> Abdurahman, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Millman, B. (2013). *British Somaliland : an administrative history, 1920-1960*. New York, NY, New York, NY : Routledge, 2013.

SEE Section III for further analysis of Xeer on Somali society. Xeer is defined as a traditional form of clan governance where a council of elders make political, economic, legal, and administrative decisions for clans based on elders' collective thought and dialogue.

<sup>22</sup> Abuhakema, G. and T. Carmichael (2010). "The Somali Youth League constitution: a handwritten Arabic copy (c. 1947?) from the Ethiopian Security Forces Archives in Harar." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 4(3): 450-466.

officers in Russia. In the late sixties over 300 Soviets soldiers served as advisors to the Somali military.<sup>23</sup>

In pursuit of its nationalist goals, the Somali Government supported Somali guerillas against Kenyan Authorities in the Northern Frontier District with training in Somalia and Soviet arms, and in 1964 entered into conflict with Ethiopian forces in the Ogaden border region.<sup>24</sup> The Ethiopians defeated the Somalis and as a result of Somali military action, Ethiopia and Kenya signed a mutual defense agreement driven by the perceived threat from the new Somali State. The failure to achieve nationalist objectives overlaid with clan politics set the stage for continued democratic disfunction for the Somali State.

Despite the popularity of the nationalist movement taking root, the traditional clan structure of society presented challenges to democracy. There are five major clan families comprising Somali Society, the Darood, Dir, Digil, Mirifle (Rahawein), Hawiye, and Isaaq.<sup>25</sup> Outside of the nationalist SYL movement, which garnered support across multiple clans, Somali political parties tended to fall along the traditional clan lines. As an example, the Somali National League (SNL) represented the Isaq Clan, and the United Somali Party (USP) represented the Dir and Darood Clans.<sup>26</sup> Steadily during election periods in 1964, 1967, and 1969 Somali politics devolved into a fight for clan power and increasingly smaller clans felt marginalized by the process. The government, now somewhat synonymous with clan families, took over revenue producing commodities in the south and instituted land reforms that pushed numerous

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<sup>23</sup> Chapin Metz, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

<sup>25</sup> Elmi, A. A. (2010). Understanding the Somalia conflagration : identity, political Islam and peacebuilding. London, New York, Oxford, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Chapin Metz, 32-34.

small farmers off their lands.<sup>27</sup> After the election in 1969, a close bodyguard assassinated President Sharmarke. The bodyguard's motivations are not clear, but several scholars posit that it might be due to perceived slight of the guard's clan in the elections process.<sup>28</sup>

Following President Sharmarke's assassination, the Somali brief experiment with democracy ended in a Military Coup perpetrated by the Somali National Army. Leaders of the Coup named Major General Mohammed Siyad Barre President and established a 25-person Supreme Ruling Council (SRC). The SRC, comprised of military officers, imprisoned members of the former democratic regime, disbanded the constitution, and sought to establish a Socialist State. The goals of the SRC included an end to corruption, clan nepotism, and misrule; however, the international aspirations of unification of all Somalis remained.<sup>29</sup>

In 1970 Barre proclaimed Somali a socialist state with a hybrid form of scientific socialism grounded in both Islam and Marxism.<sup>30</sup> The declaration brought the Regime closer to the Soviet Union. The Soviets, in addition to propagating socialism, saw an opportunity to expand Soviet influence in the region and the strategic position of Somali offered significant influence in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.<sup>31</sup> As a result of the strengthened relationship, Somalia welcomed additional military and political advisors into the country.

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<sup>27</sup> Mukhtar, 549.

<sup>28</sup> Njoku, 140.

<sup>29</sup> Chapin Metz, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Njoku, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Meredith, M. (2011). The fate of Africa : a history of fifty years of independence. New York, New York : Public Affairs, 2011.

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The Barre Regime sought to remake Somali society in a socialist image and some scholars believe Barre saw socialism as the cure to clannism in society. Development programs, literacy programs, economic programs and government restructuring were among some of the domestic successes in the early years of Somalia's experiment with socialism.<sup>32</sup> Despite the welcomed improvements in everyday life, Barre faced two significant challenges in the early days of instituting his socialist agenda. First, Barre warded off an internal coup attempt from within the SRC. While little is known about the motivations of this coup attempt, scholars note that increasingly Barre positioned members of his clan family in key strategic positions. Historian Raphael Njoku notes that within the SRC Barre created an inner circle loyal along clan and family lines.<sup>33</sup> Though publicly Barre sought to rid Somali society of clannism in accordance with socialist ideology, privately he continued to rely most heavily on his clan. The second internal opposition arose from Islamic scholars who viewed much of Barre's agenda as un-Islamic. Though illegal under regime law, Islamists worked through schools and mosques to disseminate their messaging and grow their movement.<sup>34</sup> While the Islamic scholars voiced opposition peacefully, Barre ordered their arrest and execution.<sup>35</sup> The perception of hypocrisy on the clan issue and the perception of incongruence with Islamic law, coupled with ever increasing repressive tactics, steadily eroded popular support for the Regime among Somalis.

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<sup>32</sup> Muhumed Mohamed, M. (2021). "Scientific Socialism in the Horn of Africa: Revisiting the Somali Socialist Economy." *Journal of Somali Studies* 8(1): 61-61-76.

<sup>33</sup> Njoku, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Elmi, A. A. (2010). *Understanding the Somalia conflagration : identity, political Islam and peacebuilding*. London, New York, Oxford, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Adbullahi, 168.



In 1977, keeping with pan-Somali principles, Barre invaded Ethiopia to regain control over Somali dominated areas in the Ogaden region, despite Soviet objections.<sup>36</sup> Ethiopia's recent Coup appeared on the surface to provide an opening for the Somali incursion; however, the Soviets supported the newly formed socialist state in Ethiopia. Prior to the Coup, the United States supported Ethiopia, but in the aftermath of the Coup it became clear the Ethiopian revolutionaries subscribed to a socialist agenda and as a result the United States withdrew support.

Against this Cold War backdrop, the Soviets moved in to support the Ethiopians and signed a \$100 million arms agreement with the Ethiopians in 1976.<sup>37</sup> The Soviets now supported both Ethiopia and Somalia as socialist states. Barre's refusal to heed the Soviet's warnings ultimately resulted in Soviet withdrawal of support for Somalia and an increase in support to the Ethiopians. The Soviets halted arms shipments to Somalia, instead diverting equipment to Ethiopia, resulting in a complete freezing of Somali-Soviet relations.<sup>38</sup> Barre expelled all Soviet diplomatic and military personnel from Somalia, cancelled all agreements and treaties, effectively severing all ties. The Soviets responded by doubling their support efforts to Ethiopia. The Soviets brought in over 18,000 Cuban troops, 1500 Soviet Advisors and massive amounts of equipment.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tareke, G. (2000). "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* **33**(3): 635-667.

<sup>37</sup> Weiss, Kenneth G. *The Soviet involvement in the Ogaden war*. CENTER FOR NAVAL ANALYSES ALEXANDRIA VA INST OF NAVAL STUDIES, 1980.

<sup>38</sup> Yordanov, R. (2021). "Free to decide their destiny? Indigenous resistance to external forms of socialist modernity in Siad Barre's Somalia." *Third World Quarterly* **42**(3): 543-559.

<sup>39</sup> Tareke, G. (2000). "The Ethiopia-Somalia War of 1977 Revisited." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* **33**(3): 635-667.

The external support turned the tide of the war in Ethiopia's favor and in early 1978 Somali forces withdrew in defeat.

Almost immediately Barre faced an internal backlash from rival clans at home. The crippling defeat abroad and the steady perception of clan favoritism provided the catalyst for clan uprisings. Somali police forces and Barre clan loyalists crushed the uprisings with ever increasing repressive tactics. The cycle of fracture along clan lines started again. Barre's reliance on his clan loyalists, further incensed the other clans. By 1987 over half of the senior officer corps and key government positions belonged to members of Barre's clan.<sup>40</sup> Opposition clan-aligned movements continued to pop up. The Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) of the Majeerteen Clan launched attacks on the Somali Army from refuges in Ethiopia, the Somalia National Movement (SNM) of the Isaaq Clan did the same. As Barre worked to quash internal dissent, the US stepped in, filling the void left by the Soviets, and provided \$800 million in aid and military assistance to the Barre Regime.<sup>41</sup>

In 1988 Barre signed an agreement with Ethiopia banning support to respective antiregime forces in each other's territories and instituted a nationwide crackdown on the clans.<sup>42</sup> In implementing the nationwide crackdown Army and Police loyalists began a campaign of terror, particularly against the SNM and the Isaaq Clan in the northern Somaliland. Some scholars refer to the Somali action against the Isaaqs as genocide. Bombing of the civilian population, poisoning of wells, refusing to allow civilians to bury

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Meredith, 468.

<sup>42</sup> Baumann, R. F., et al. (2004). My clan against the world : US and coalition forces in Somalia, 1992-1994. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas : Combat Studies Institute Press, [2004]. 15-16.

their dead in accordance with Islamic law, were but a few of the atrocities committed against the Isaac clan and resulted in an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 killed in the north.<sup>43</sup>

In the south, Ogaden clansmen (refugees from the 1977 Ogaden War) challenged the traditional balance of power of Barre's clan loyalists, resulting in oppression by the state of the Ogaden Clans. In response the Ogaden took up arms as the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM).<sup>44</sup> In central Somali the Hawaiye Clan also revolted and established the United Somali Congress (USC) led by General Mohamed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahadi. The Barre Regime now faced clan uprisings in the north, south and central regions of Somalia. The armed resistance groups continued to amass battlefield victories against the Somali Army and Police Forces edging closer to Mogadishu. In 1991 Barre fled the capital but continued to fight against Aideed's militia until 1992. Ultimately, Aideed's militia prevailed in the south and Barre went into exile effectively ending his regime and the campaign of terror he unleashed on Somali Society.

Following the collapse of the Regime, opposition parties began to establish their own administrations at the regional level. Interestingly, the SNM in the north called for an independent Somaliland like the pre 1960 British Somaliland. Taking control in the northeast, the SSDF laid the groundwork for an independent Puntland. In the south a different dynamic ensued.

Mogadishu and surrounding southern areas fell into the hands of the numerous insurgent groups, chief among them the USC of the Hawiye Clan. Ali Mahdi and

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<sup>43</sup> Ingiriis, M. H. (2016). "'We Swallowed the State as the State Swallowed Us': The Genesis, Genealogies, and Geographies of Genocides in Somalia." *African Security* 9(3): 237-258.

<sup>44</sup> Baumann & Yates, 16.

General Farah Aideed, both Hawiye Clansmen (but different sub-clans), arose as rival leaders of the USC in Mogadishu. Ali Mahdi served as the interim President (self-appointed), while Aideed controlled the military wing of the USC, and in 1991 they successfully established a ceasefire.<sup>45</sup> Ali Mahdi attempted to hold a reconciliation conference following the ceasefire to no avail. Then Djibouti made another attempt at reconciliation talks also to no avail. In late 1991 the USC fractured, and renewed violence erupted between subclan forces loyal to Mahdi and subclan forces loyal to Aideed. The interclan and intraclan violence quickly spread to the countryside. The clans, victims of Barre's barbaric repressive tactics, instituted their own repressive tactics against one another. Some of the oppressive tactics included: denying food to opposing clans, destroying crops, sabotaging water supplies, torture, rape, and murder. These horrors resulted in a humanitarian crisis and a refugee problem in neighboring Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti.<sup>46</sup>

The same year Somalia suffered a severe drought and famine accelerating the competition for resources between the clans. Finally in 1992, the United Nations brokered a ceasefire between the clans, with the hopes of bringing humanitarian relief to the Somalis. Reports indicate multiple Non-governmental Organizations attempted to provide vital food relief, only to have donated food supplies confiscated or hoarded by local clansmen.<sup>47</sup> The need to set up food distribution relief sites required security, in addition to international food aid pledges from donor nations. In response the UN

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<sup>45</sup> Sahnoun, M. (1994). Somalia The Missed Opportunities. Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace.

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<sup>46</sup> Baumann & Yates, 17-18.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 17.

authorized the deployment of a Battalion of Pakistani peacekeepers and titled the operation UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). This initial effort failed. The clans proved unwilling to allow distribution of relief for fear it might provide another clan with advantages. The Pakistani force was too small and risked becoming embroiled in combat if it attempted any form of peace enforcement.

The UN altered course and in December 1992 sanctioned the establishment of the Unified Task Force (UNITF). The organization would be US led and given the authority to conduct peace enforcement activities in order to establish a secure environment for humanitarian aid distribution. The multinational force conducted operations and delivered needed aid; however, in attempting to enforce peace it became more embroiled in combat with the clans. In June 1993, Pakistani Peacekeepers suffered 24 casualties from a General Aideed laid ambush.<sup>48</sup> In response the UN issued another resolution authorizing UNITF to take action directly against the perpetrators, resulting in direct combat with Aideed's militias. Then in October 1993, the US suffered 19 casualties in what became known as the Battle of Mogadishu.<sup>49</sup> Unable to ensure a lasting peace and with mounting casualties, the United States withdrew in March 1994; with the UN following in 1995. Many scholars characterize the UNOSOM mission as a moderate humanitarian success, but a failure in quelling clan violence, establishing security, and institution building.

Over the next ten years clans competed violently for control of terrain and resources across Somalia. The international community, including the European Union (EU), African Union (AU), and United Nations (UN) sponsored countless conferences in

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<sup>48</sup> Baumann & Yates, 109.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 139-159.

Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti to establish peace and a centralized government in Somalia. Various conferences produced a Transitional National Government (TNG), then a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. The formation of a centralized government that included the semiautonomous regions in Somaliland, Puntland, and the lawless southern region with external support of previous enemies in Kenya and Ethiopia continues to this day. All the while, Somali citizens suffered unspeakable horrors, brutality, starvation, and a lack of predictability in everyday life at the hands of clan leaders and warlords.

### **B. The Rise of al Shabaab**

In 2001, the United States, concerned about the spread of Islamic extremism and terror in the aftermath of 9/11, named the Somali Islamist Group Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) in Executive Order 13224 a terrorist group.<sup>50</sup> AIAI, initially established in the 1980s and comprised of students, teachers, and professionals, promoted Islamic values and the creation of an Islamic State in Somalia. Uncharacteristically for the day, the organization attracted members from across all clans. In the 1990s, after the chaotic fall of the Barre regime, the organization took up arms. During relief efforts under the UNOSOM, AIAI temporarily gained control of the port of Kismayo, and according to UNOSOM officials, the organization was “relatively honest and effective stewards of international relief in contrast to predatory militias.”<sup>51</sup> In the Ogaden region, AIAI came

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<sup>50</sup> (2022). "Executive Order 13224 - United States Department of State." from <https://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/>.

<sup>51</sup> Anonymous (2001). "Somalia's al-Ittihad al-Islami: A key factor in the stability of the Horn of Africa." *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy* **29**(11/12): 8-11.

to the defense of Somalis against perceived or real oppression from the Christian dominated Ethiopian Government. In the Gedo region of southwest Somalia AIAI captured small cities in 1996 and were widely reported to be less corrupt and more peaceful in the areas they controlled.<sup>52</sup> After a series of defeats by rival clans, AIAI adopted a nonviolent approach preferring to further its agenda of uniting Somalis around Islamic values through education. The goals and objectives of AIAI established a foundation or philosophy for Somalia later seen in the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and its militia Al Shabaab. Scholars argue that the US designation of AIAI as a terrorist organization, coupled with Ethiopian crack downs, left a perception in the minds of Somalis that the US was at war with Islam.<sup>53</sup>

Al Shabaab, which translated means “the youth”, is an insurgent organization born of the UIC that uses international terror as a tactic in its fight for state power and the right to govern Somalis.<sup>54</sup> The birth of Al Shabaab traces back to 2004 when Somali political leadership established a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Baidoa, Somalia. Clan dynamics and rivalries plagued the fledging government, resulting in ineffectual governance and trust deficits with many Somalis.<sup>55</sup> With a central government devoid of any real security apparatus, much of the country, including the capital city of Mogadishu, remained outside of government control.

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<sup>52</sup> Elmi, 78-79.

<sup>53</sup> SEE Elmi, 86-88. Menkhaus, K. (2021). "Project MUSE - Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping." *International Security* **31**(Winter 2006/2007).

<sup>54</sup> Miller, M. A. (2013). *The foundations of modern terrorism: State, society and the dynamics of political violence*, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>55</sup> Menkhaus, K. (2021). "Project MUSE - Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping." *International Security* **31**(Winter 2006/2007).

In 2006, the United States made overtures to a group of clan militia leaders for help in capturing Al Qaeda members seeking refuge in Somalia as part of the ongoing War on Terror.<sup>56</sup> The group became known as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism (ARPCT). As a collection of warlords and militia leaders, ARPCT was not only prone to infighting, but largely viewed by everyday Somalis as corrupt and self-serving.<sup>57</sup> Rival clans within ARPCT violently clashed over control of the seaport of El Ma'an in Mogadishu. During the infighting, leadership from the Hawiye clan requested assistance from the UIC and Al Shabaab in restoring order, which ultimately provided an avenue for the complete takeover of Mogadishu by the UIC.<sup>58</sup>

Eventually, the UIC gained control of not only Mogadishu, but much of Southern Somalia. The UIC and Islamic institutions provided a source of stability for Somalis since the collapse of the Somali Government in the early 1990s, so the takeover and structure provided by the UIC was welcomed by most Somalis. To enforce decisions made by the Courts, the UIC turned to Al Shabaab, who provided brutal policing functions on behalf of the court and remained dedicated to a united stable Somalia under Sharia Law.

As the UIC gained control, they immediately established law and order, opened the international airport, opened seaports, and restored services.<sup>59</sup> The UIC's ability to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Barnes, C. and H. Hassan (2007). "The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts." Journal of Eastern African Studies 1(2): 151-160.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Mwangi, O. G. (2010). "The Union of Islamic Courts and security governance in Somalia." African Security Review 19(1): 88-94.



establish security and halt the violence made it an attractive option, even to those who did not subscribe to Islamic rule.<sup>60</sup> Despite the harshness of Sharia Law, many Somalis appeared willing to support the governance brought by the UIC simply because it brought stability and predictability to Somali life. Cedric Barnes of the International Crisis Group notes, "The Court achieved the unthinkable, uniting Mogadishu for the first time in 16 years, and reestablished peace and security."<sup>61</sup> Many scholars refer to the brief rule provided by the UIC as the "Golden Age" of stability in Somalia; however, it did not last.

As the UIC continued expanding, it moved against the TFG in Baidoa to consolidate control and establish itself as the sole governing authority. Ethiopian troops stationed there as trainers and advisers to the TFG found themselves in routine clashes with UIC forces.<sup>62</sup> Fearing the growing power of the UIC and the potential for a "Taliban like" state in Somalia, Ethiopian forces backed by the US invaded Somalia in late 2006.

The Ethiopians quickly defeated the UIC, assisted the TFG in establishing nominal control in Mogadishu, and paved the way for future UN Peacekeeping forces to enter Somalia.<sup>63</sup> After defeat the UIC fractured along two lines, those who returned to non-violent means of resistance to occupation, and those who subscribed to an ever

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<sup>60</sup> Menkhaus, K. (2009). "Somalia: 'They Created a Desert and Called it Peace(building)'.<sup>60</sup> Review of African Political Economy **36**(120): 223-233.

<sup>61</sup> Barnes, C. and H. Hassan (2007). "The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts." Journal of Eastern African Studies **1**(2): 151-160.

<sup>62</sup> Allo, A. K. (2009). "Counter-intervention, invitation, both or neither: an appraisal of the 2006 Ethiopian intervention in Somalia." Mizan Law Review **3**(2): 201-239.

<sup>63</sup> Hesse, B. J. (2016). "Two Generations, Two Interventions in One of the World's Most-Failed States: The United States, Kenya and Ethiopia in Somalia." Journal of Asian and African Studies **51**(5): 573-593.

increasingly violent means to resist occupation. The militant wing of the UIC, Al Shabaab, continues to wage an insurgency across East Africa to this day. Despite the ongoing insurgency, in 2012 the TFG ratified the Somali Constitution and officially transitioned to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS).

### **III. Analysis**

Somali society's experience with governance and conflict includes: Islamic law administered by Sultanates, colonial rule administered by western powers, democracy resulting in a military coup, authoritarian socialism administered by a dictator, no central government with lawlessness and external intervention, a brief period of Islamic law administered by the Union of Islamic Courts, and finally a Somali Federal Government backed by AMISOM forces from Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya, but contested by an Islamist insurgency. Ethnic Somalis live in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, and in Djibouti; separated by arbitrary borders drawn during colonial periods without Somali input. The question of what to do about the greater Somali diaspora problem is outside the scope of this paper, but it is important in recognizing how external actors influence Somali politics, governance, and the continuous cycle of violence. The below analysis is focused towards determining what forms of governance might be *more* likely to succeed given the historical social, cultural, and religious values of Somali society. By exploring the principles of Social Fit, ideological resonance, expectations regarding the social contract, and comfort and familiarity, it might be possible to create a better policy for Somalia.

### A. The Social Fit Framework<sup>64</sup>

The Social Fit framework is a tool to analyze a society to better understand and predict what factors might lead to acceptance of governance by the governed.

Analyzing a society using the three components ideological resonance, expectations regarding the social contract, and comfort and familiarity might predict which forms of governance and processes will achieve a better “Fit” with society, thereby reducing the likelihood of continued violence. The greater the ideological resonance, the more closely aligned society’s expectations are with that of the government, and the more comfortable or familiar society is with the governance structure, then the greater the Social Fit. The greater the Social Fit, the greater the likelihood that the post-conflict government will be stable. Analyzing a society to determine Social Fit might offer policy makers and practitioners insight into what might, and what might not, work *before* diplomatic or military intervention.

Ideological resonance, refers to the degree to which the governing system does or does not resonate with the population’s values. The degree to which a post conflict government’s preferred view of how humans should behave corresponds with the view of the governed. The more these views align, the greater the ideological resonance. Recognition that the alignment of a post-conflict government with its constituent society’s critical belief(s) or value(s) may have a significant impact on that government’s success.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Bishop, J. G. M. (2011). Governing in a Post-Conflict Society: Social Fit. Defense Analysis. Monterey, CA, Naval Post Graduate School. **Masters:** 97.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 15.

The social contract is the agreement between the government and those it governs that delineates the expected functions and performance of both the government and the citizens.<sup>66</sup> In establishing post-conflict governance, it is critical to ask what citizens expect from their government and what government expects of them. The more a post-conflict government can provide the functions desired by members of society, to the degree expected, the greater the likelihood there will be a tight Social Fit and reduce the chances of further violence.<sup>67</sup>

The third component of Social Fit is comfort and familiarity. 'Familiarity' refers to the degree to which members of a society are comfortable and/or familiar with the day-to-day processes used by the government to conduct its affairs. Processes include but are not limited to: the delivery of essential services, such as education, the ability to coordinate security, legislate, apply the rule of law, and provide justice. Achieving comfort and familiarity requires assessing local history and culture. The more comfortable and familiar the society is with the systems and processes of the government, the more likely the government and society will achieve Social Fit.<sup>68</sup>

## **B. Somalia Ideological Resonance**

Ideological resonance, refers to the degree to which the governing system does or does not resonate with the population's values. The degree to which a post conflict government's preferred view of how humans should behave corresponds with the view

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<sup>66</sup> Williams, D. L. (2014). Rousseau's social contract : an introduction. Cambridge, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2014.

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<sup>67</sup> Bishop, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

of the governed. The more these views align, the greater the ideological resonance. Somali social and political order is based on decentralized traditional clan-based governance structures and political Islam.<sup>69</sup> The values of Somali society are rooted in Islam, Xeer (traditional clan or tribal law), and Clannism. Therefore, any legitimate government in Somali should reflect these values.

### Islam as a Value System

Somali Society is more than 99% Sunni Muslim.<sup>70</sup> Throughout the course of Somali history Islam played a central role in all aspects of Somali life. African historian Mohammed El Fasi notes "Islam is not only a religion: it is a comprehensive way of life, catering for all the fields of human existence. Islam provides guidance for all aspects of life - individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international."<sup>71</sup> Islamist movements in Somalia tend to gain traction with Somali society for multiple reasons, but three stand out. First, is the recognition that Islam might provide a universal set of values that transcends disparate and different clan values. Second, Islamists provide social services through education and medical services, and thirdly, sharia courts provide rule of law and security.<sup>72</sup>

The Union of Islamic Courts movement of 2006 and the subsequent intervention by Ethiopia with US support provides an example of diplomatic and military action without consideration of the ideological resonance of the society. As noted previously,

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<sup>69</sup> Shank, M. (2007). "Understanding political Islam in Somalia." Contemporary Islam 1(1): 89-103.

<sup>70</sup> State, U. S. D. o. (2022). 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/somalia/>

<sup>71</sup> El Fasi, M. (1988). General History of Africa III: Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century. Paris, France, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. P 20.

<sup>72</sup> Elmi, 62.

scholars call the period under the UIC as the most stable time in Southern Somalia. Despite the harshness of sharia implementation, Somalis recognized the values of sharia and the ability to establish a universal standard of values for society.

Historian Abdurahman Abdullahi notes that the theory of Asaybiya might apply in helping to explain this phenomenon. The theory of Asaybiya was developed by Ibn-Khaldun during his study of nomadic tribal societies that subscribed to the Islamic religion in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Ibn-Khaldun suggests that nomadic societies will conflict in a vicious cycle of violence “without the intervention of a religious moral standard that lessens its ferocity and savageness with the teaching of the universal values.”<sup>73</sup> The UIC provided the universal values in its application of sharia, and this might explain the reduction in violence during the UIC’s tenure.

Ethiopia, a historical counter to Somali desire for a greater Somalia and arguably a historical enemy of Somalis, invaded in 2006 overthrowing the UIC. The US supported this action diplomatically and militarily; however, had careful consideration of the ideological resonance of the society been examined, different actions might make more sense. The difficult question to consider: Is an oppressive Islamic State that brings peace and an end to clan violence better than a more democratic organization that is trapped in a continued cycle of violence?

### Xeer & Clannism as a Value System

Interwoven throughout the fabric of Somali society is the clan-based tradition of making political decisions and resolving conflict through Xeer. The customary law of Xeer is a system of enforceable rules that evolves naturally over time based on

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<sup>73</sup> Abdullahi, 179-181.

historical conflict resolution within the local clan structure by establishing a social set of norms to safeguard security and social justice for Somalis.<sup>74</sup> Through Xeer, leaders are often picked at the local level based on seniority (age) and perceived wisdom. The elders hold councils in making decisions. Scholars agree that Xeer existed in Somali prior to any colonial influence of alternative forms of governing. As early as the British colonization of British Somaliland, authorities recognized the clash of Xeer with hierarchical western governance structures. In trying to blend the two, colonialist authorities fostered divides between rural and urban communities, where rural communities maintained Xeer systems in choosing leaders, while urban communities were exposed to electoral processes. An additional challenge to the rural urban divide is the local and clan specific application of Xeer. Each Clan, and sometimes the same clan but in different regions, varies in how decisions are made, what decisions are made, and who will lead.

The value of the clan cannot be understated in Somali society. From childhood every Somali is “expected to learn and recite the male line back generations to a common patriarch, and political allegiance follows a bottom-up approach of immediate family, immediate family lineage, clan of lineage, clan family (several clans), confederacy of five clan families (Darood, Hawiye, Isaq, Dir, Digil-Mirifleh.”<sup>75</sup> A 2017 survey of Somalis conducted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) indicates overwhelmingly Somalis support decision-making

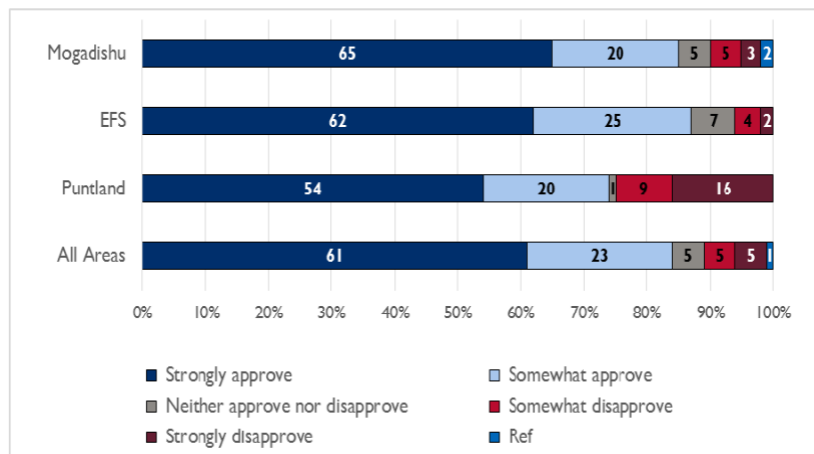
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<sup>74</sup> Notten, M. v. and S. H. MacCallum (2005). *The law of the Somalis : a stable foundation for economic development in the Horn of Africa*. Trenton, NJ, Trenton, NJ : Red Sea Press, c2005.

<sup>75</sup> Meredith, M. (2011). *The fate of Africa : a history of fifty years of independence*. New York, New York : Public Affairs, 2011.

through clan agreements (See Figure below).<sup>76</sup> From an ideological perspective, the deep rooted familial ties and fealty for one's kin is rooted in trust. Somalis trust family and family lineage above any other institution, which might explain why Somalis prefer decision making through agreements between clans.

**Figure 46: Decision-Making through Agreement between Clans**



*Figure 1 Somali Perceptions Survey 2017<sup>77</sup>*

Analyzing Somali society according to Ideological Resonance illuminates two distinct characteristics that should be present in determining what future systems of governance may be more likely to reduce violence. First, political Islam might provide a universal set of values for society that transcends variations in traditional clan value systems. Second, the clan value systems cannot be discounted, specifically clan elders and leaders power discounted by Islam authority. A system that accounts for universal Islamic values, while also including clan dynamics is more likely to resonate with

<sup>76</sup> Robertson, L. M., Lucas. Oing, Lauren. (2017). Somali Perceptions Survey, Part I: The Emerging Federal States, Mogadishu, and Puntland. IBTCI. Vienna, VA, USAID.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



Somalis. In the next section we will analyze expectations of the social contract in Somali society.

### **C. Somalia Social Contract: Expectations**

The social contract is the agreement between the government and those it governs that delineates the expected functions and/or performance of both the government and the citizens.<sup>78</sup> In establishing post-conflict governance, it is critical to ask what citizens expect from their government and what government expects of them. The more a post-conflict government can provide the functions desired by members of society, to the degree expected, the greater the likelihood there will be a tight Social Fit.

In the 2017 survey of Somalis from Somaliland, Puntland, and Mogadishu Somalis universally agreed security is the number one issue facing the state and overwhelmingly support additional government spending in the security sector (See figure 2).<sup>79</sup> The primary service desired by Somalis is security and with security comes a degree of stability and predictability. According to the UN Secretary General's report on Somalia, Somalis experience a monthly average of 273 incidents of violence across the country.<sup>80</sup> Rampant crime, including robbery, assault, rape, and kidnappings occur daily. Law enforcement and justice for such crimes is applied unevenly or not at all in areas under government control. Local courts operate under a combination of customary and Islamic law, resulting in significantly different sentences for similar

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<sup>78</sup> Williams, D. L. (2014). Rousseau's social contract : an introduction. Cambridge, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Robertson, L.M. 33-34.

<sup>80</sup> Council, U. N. S. (2022). "Situation in Somalia: Report of the Secretary-General." from [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2021\\_944\\_E.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2021_944_E.pdf).

crimes.<sup>81</sup> The expectation of Security, as the primary service desired by the Somali people, is not currently being fulfilled by the government.

Figure 28: Top Priority for Additional Spending, Urban versus Rural

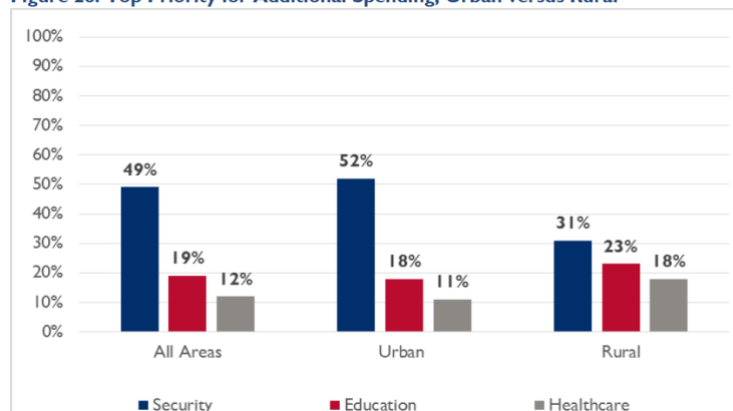


Figure 2 Somali Priority for Government Spending<sup>82</sup>

Conversely, and as noted by the International Crisis Group, the Somali Government is failing to provide services, where Al Shabaab is succeeding, particularly in rural areas by providing conflict resolution through established Sharia justice systems.<sup>83</sup> The brutal application of Sharia is no doubt contrary to the preservation of human rights accustomed to in the West; however, Sharia as applied under the Union of Islamic Courts, provides a universal set of rules understood by society that result in significant decreases in crime and violence. The rules are known, and enforcement of rule violations is dealt with swiftly. Why might Somalis tolerate Sharia, or even desire it? It brings a universally understood set of rules and values that provide society with predictability.

<sup>81</sup> Council, O. S. A. (2022). Somalia 2020 Crime and Safety Report.

<sup>82</sup> Robertson, L.M. 34.

<sup>83</sup> Mahmood, O. A. A. (2021). "Could Somalia Be the Next Afghanistan?".

A similar rapid collapse of state institutions awaits if Somali elites and Western governments don't alter their approach.

David Kilcullen refers to the sacrifice of individual rights and tolerance of repressive policing functions for security and predictability as “Competitive Control, where nonstate armed groups create predictability and order as a way of generating popular support.”<sup>84</sup> Kilcullen goes on to elaborate, “the idea is that populations respond to predictable, ordered, normative systems that tell them exactly what they need to do, and not do, to be safe.”<sup>85</sup> Another way to think about this dynamic from the Somali perspective is answering a simple question: is it better to absorb a degree of repression for security, or to maintain individual freedoms in an environment riddled with crime, corruption, and violence? Scholars agree throughout history when Somali Islamist movements gain control over territories, the regions they control tend to be more peaceful and stable because they establish normative systems, where a set of rules are established that also correlate with a set of consequences.<sup>86</sup> In 2006, the UIC implemented such a normative system in Southern Somalia. The US supported invasion by Ethiopia disrupted the normative system and returned the country to the fractured cycle of violence.

Security, as an expected function of the government by the governed, requires a normative system of values and consequences to establish order. Warlords, clan elites, and FGS political elites lack the coherent value structure and enforcement mechanisms

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<sup>84</sup> Kilcullen, D. (2013). Out of the mountains : the coming age of the urban guerrilla. New York, New York : Oxford University Press, [2013].

125.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 132.

to meet the contractual expectations of the governed. The expectations of the social contract for security are not currently met by the state.

Additional expectations of the governed include education and healthcare. In areas under their control, the UIC and Al Shabaab not only established a normative system for security, but continue to work through established Islamic institutions in education and community health centers.<sup>87</sup> There is a natural tie between the UIC, Al Shabaab, and the existing schools and health centers. Over the course of history, Islamic leaders ran the schools and health centers. The UIC and Al Shabbaab are not credited with their establishment but are credited with leveraging the existing systems to provide the appearance they are meeting the expectations of the governed in education and healthcare. As a result, large segments of the population support the Islamist Groups, as the Islamist groups provide social services, where the state does not.<sup>88</sup>

Analysis of expectations of the governed in Somalia illuminates two significant dynamics that a governing system must address to limit the likelihood of continued violence across society. First, a normative system rooted in accepted Somali values that establishes rules and consequences is essential to providing the basic expectation of security. Second, the expectations of education and healthcare can be met through exiting Islamic institutions. Therefore, a system that addresses these two dynamics is a better Social Fit for Somali society. It is important to note, ideological resonance and meeting expectations of the social contract are not enough to achieve Social Fit. The way in which a governing system conducts daily affairs is equally as important in

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<sup>87</sup> Giad, Samira. "Episode 2 Eastern Africa's Jihadis: Somalia" The Horn. Podcast Audio, August 25, 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/horn>.

<sup>88</sup> Elmi, 62.

achieving Social Fit. In the next section we will address comfort and familiarity with systems and processes as the final component requiring consideration in achieving Social Fit.

#### **D. Somali Comfort and Familiarity**

Comfort and Familiarity refers to the degree to which members of a society are comfortable and/or familiar with the day-to-day processes used by the government to conduct its affairs. Simply stated, does society understand and recognize *how* a governing body delivers essentials, coordinates security, legislates, or applies the rule of law? The more comfortable and familiar society is with systems and processes used by the governing body, the more likely the governing body can achieve Social Fit. In Somalia the structure of the current government, process by which government officials are selected, and the multiple legal systems are largely unfamiliar and therefore less comfortable.

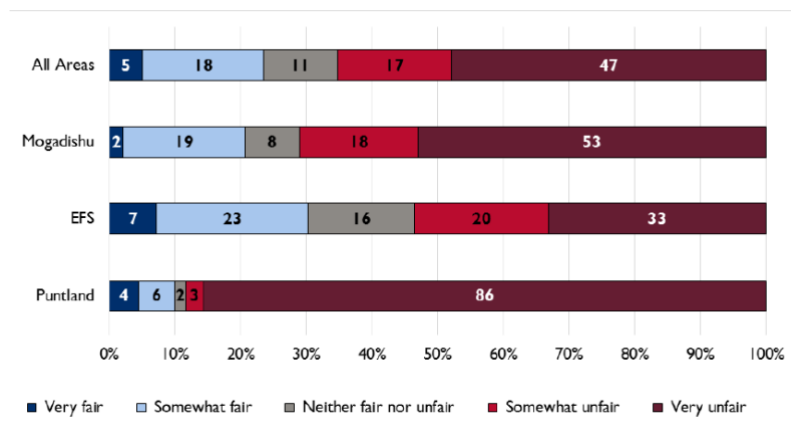
The current structure of the FGS follows a 4.5 power sharing agreement. The agreement originated from attempts to account for clan allegiances within a democratic hierarchical government structure. The Transitional National Government decided in 2000 that the best way to formulate a National Government was through the creation of a power sharing agreement between the clans. The agreement established a parliament of 245 seats and then partitioned the seats among the most prominent clan families of the Dir, Darood, Ha wiye, and Digil-Mirifle.<sup>89</sup> The 4.5 formula gives the prominent clan families roughly one quarter of the seats, while .5 is given to remaining

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<sup>89</sup> Ahmed, N. M. (2019). "Somalia's Struggle to Integrate Traditional and Modern Governance Systems: The 4.5 Formula and the 2012 Provisional Constitution." Journal of Somali Studies 6(1): 41-69.

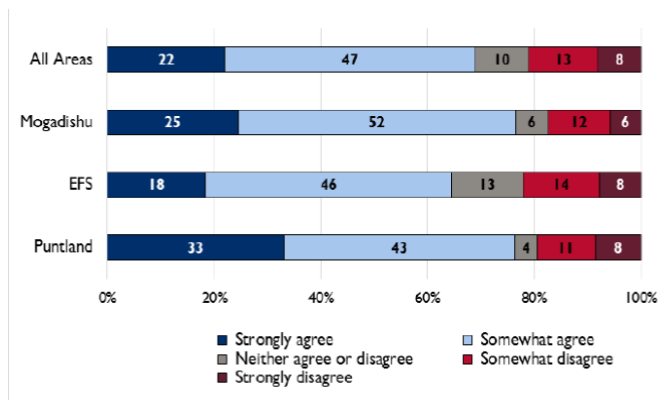
minority clans. Individual seats are filled through indirect elections within the clan families. In a recent survey of Somalis, 64% of respondents in all areas indicated that the 4.5 formula is somewhat to very unfair, and furthermore, 69% of respondents indicated current politics and government matters are too complicated to understand (See Figures 3 & 4).<sup>90</sup>

**Figure 52: Fairness of the 4.5 Formula**



*Figure 3 Fairness of 4.5 Formula<sup>91</sup>*

**Figure 13: Percentage of Respondents Who Agreed with the Statement "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on."**



*Figure 4 Complexity of Politics and Government, p18.<sup>92</sup>*

<sup>90</sup> Robertson, L.M. 57.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 18.

The power sharing system and the process by which a clan official is elected to a seat in parliament is not only viewed as extremely complicated, but also unfair based on the surveys. This indicates a misalignment of comfort and familiarity between the Somali people and their state regarding the structure and processes of the state.

Currently, multiple legal systems exist in Somalia. As mentioned previously, customary law (Xeer), Sharia law, national law and international law all intersect and overlap in many communities. Somali Islamic scholar Abdurahman M. Abdullahi describes the current legal system existing in most Somali communities:

*The traditional legal system as it has evolved in Somalia is a combination of Shari'a and xeer. In most traditional settings, clan elders oversee the implementation of the local xeer, while Islamic scholars are responsible for and called upon to render religious judgments related to criminal acts and civil disputes. At the community level, then, xeer and Shari'a constitute parallel and interlocking systems of legislation. Shari'a law is familiar to most Somalis, though its application in combination with xeer varies from community to community.*<sup>93</sup>

The traditional processes outlined above are most familiar to Somalis. The addition of externally driven national laws or international laws are largely unfamiliar. Interestingly, notions of justice within the system described above might be contrary to prescriptions outlined in the Somali constitution of 2012. In the application of Sharia and Xeer, clan elders and Islamic scholars might arrive at a decision based on collective responsibilities of clan members, resulting in accountability to the clan instead of the individual responsible for the transgression committed.<sup>94</sup> This is in contradiction of the Somali Constitution that champions, individual responsibility, individual rights, individual

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<sup>93</sup> Abdullahi, A. M. (2014). "Conceptions of Transitional Justice in Somalia: Findings of Field Research in Mogadishu." *Northeast African Studies* 14(2): 7-43.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

freedoms. Somalis are more familiar and comfortable with the traditional processes and understand their application more readily than those outlined in the Constitution. To a degree, Al Shabaab's success in areas they control is due to their adherence to working within the traditional clan structures to establish Islamic law.<sup>95</sup>

## **E. Conclusions**

Careful examination of the ideological resonance, expectations of the social contract and comfort and familiarity illuminate what forms of government might achieve a Social Fit and what forms of government might foster resistance or continued violence. First, the role of Islam in society, coupled with the clan structure, ideologically resonates with Somali society; therefore, we can predict some form of a theocratic state is more likely to succeed than a secular state. Second, sharia provides a normative system of rules and consequences that will meet the expectations of the governed for security, education, and healthcare; therefore, we can expect more rigid and brutish policing tactics in establishing order. Third, Somalis are most comfortable and familiar with traditional structures and processes at the local level which might mean a hierarchical governance structure at the national level that embraces individualism is less likely to succeed. Using the framework of Social Fit only gives us an idea of what might work for Somalis and what might not work. Policy decisions should consider the societal and cultural nuances of Somalis before acting diplomatically or militarily. Given what is more likely a Social Fit in Somalia, how should the US proceed?

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<sup>95</sup> Skjelderup, M. W. (2020). "Jihadi governance and traditional authority structures: al-Shabaab and Clan Elders in Southern Somalia, 2008-2012." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31(6): 1174-1195.



#### **IV. Policy Implications**

*'Ironically, Somali history has demonstrated that serious disorders have been traced, not to any malfunction of the Somali system of authority, but to the unimaginative application of alien systems of government which have inadvertently undermined it.'*<sup>96</sup>

The United States relationship with Somalia has ebbed and flowed in recent history. Post-Cold War dynamics led to US support to the Barre Regime, including military assistance and arms sales in the 1980s. Strategically, this made sense as the US sought to counter Soviet influence globally, but resulted in indirect oppression of the Somali people by the Barre Regime and an increase in arms across the country. Then in 1991 after the defeat of the Barre Regime by the clans, the US nobly attempted to bring humanitarian relief to Somalis through intervention and peace enforcement under the UN. While the relief efforts were largely a success, US and UN forces became embroiled in ground combat with the clans, losing 19 US service members in 1993. The UN and US ultimately abandoned the effort in 1994-1995 returning Somalia to a stateless nation controlled by warlords and clans.

It was not until the UIC established control in 2006 that any form of order emerged in Mogadishu. In a post 9/11 world, the US subverted the UIC efforts by backing warlords to address terrorism connections in Somalia, and then backed the

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<sup>96</sup> Harper, M. (2012). Getting Somalia Wrong? : Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State. London, UNITED KINGDOM, Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.

Ethiopian intervention that toppled the UIC. In 2007, more than 70 Islamist groups signed a fatwa to resist foreign invaders and their supporters, justifying their actions under sharia law believing that when a Muslim State is attacked by a non-Muslim State jihad becomes mandatory for all Muslims.<sup>97</sup> The U.S. decision to back one of Somalia's historical enemies, Ethiopia and a largely Christian nation, in intervention resulted in an Islamic insurgency, and likely gave rise to the more extremist wings of the UIC, namely Al Shabaab.

Currently, the FGS remains embroiled in conflict with Al Shababb, in competition with member states, and propped up by an external force of AMISOM forces from Uganda, Ethiopia, Burundi, Kenya, and Djibouti.<sup>98</sup> Though AMISOM forces expelled Al Shabaab from all major urban centers over the last 5 years, Al Shabaab still exerts control and influence over much of the country through its unique relationship and familiarity with the clan leaders and clan structure.<sup>99</sup> The UN recently extended the AMISOM mission until March of 2022 due to the ongoing threat posed by the terrorist group and the inability of Somali security forces to deal with the threat. The FGS is continuing to work with AMISOM on an exit strategy that will transition all security requirements from the foreign led forces to Somali forces. However, prominent scholars note the FGS is unlikely to succeed without significant continued external support and might have the opposite effect of further uniting extremist groups against the state. In *Somalia: A New Approach* Bronwyn Bruton advocates for a strategy of constructive

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<sup>97</sup> Elmi, 62.

<sup>98</sup> amisomsomalia (2022). "AMISOM Military Component - AMISOM." from <https://amisom-au.org/mission-profile/military-component/>.

<sup>99</sup> Giad, Samira. "Episode 2 Eastern Africa's Jihadis: Somalia" The Horn. Podcast Audio, August 25, 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/horn>.

disengagement, “where external actors disengage diplomatically to allow Somalis to negotiate, while also signaling a willingness to coexist with any Islamist government that emerges as long it rejects regional aggression, global jihadi ambitions, and tolerates western humanitarian relief efforts in Somalia.”<sup>100</sup> Bruton’s strategy accounts for what might be the best option to achieve Social Fit for Somalis.

Broadly, the US Foreign policy objectives in Somalia are to promote political stability through the strengthening of democratic institutions, prevent the use of Somalia as a safe haven for international terrorism by improving security capabilities, and alleviate the humanitarian crisis caused by years of conflict, drought, flooding, and poor governance.<sup>101</sup> Until the withdrawal of almost all US forces by the Trump Administration in December of 2020, the US strategy included the strengthening of security institutions through partnerships with the SNA and AMISOM, and sustained pressure on Al Shabaab through counter terror operations. Today, the strategy remains largely unchanged, but with less capability and capacity to provide direct support to the SNA and AMISOM forces.

Considering Social Fit and what forms of governance are more likely to limit resistance and violence, the US should influence the FGS and AMISOM to begin negotiations with Al Shabaab in central and southern Somalia, while at the same time taking action to fracture the relationship between Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda. Through the Social Fit framework, we see clearly Somali social and political order is based on

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<sup>100</sup> Bruton, Bronwyn E. *Somalia: A new approach*. No. 52. Council on Foreign Relations, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> (2021). "U.S. Relations With Somalia - United States Department of State." from <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-somalia/>.

decentralized traditional clan-based governance structures and political Islam.<sup>102</sup> Large portions of Somali society subscribe to this version of theocratic governance and eventually, the FGS must address grievances brought by Somalis aligned and united in the Islamic faith and incorporate them into the political dialogue. Until such time, the conflict will likely continue without end. But are negotiations even possible?

Since its inception Al Shabaab focused regionally on uniting Somalis under Sharia law. It was not until 2012, five years after the perceived foreign invasion by Ethiopia with US support, that Al Shabaab declared allegiance to Al Qaeda. One explanation for the lag in cementing its relationship with Al Qaeda is Al Shabaab wanted to remain regionally focused in accordance with the original UIC vision. Amongst Scholars and practitioners, the degree to which Al Shabaab is truly aligned to Al Qaeda remains in question. Some scholars see the Al Shabaab relationship as a marriage of convenience, where Al Shabaab receives legitimacy and resources from Al Qaeda to pursue their regional goals.<sup>103</sup> Al Shabaab's attacks in Ethiopia, Uganda, and more recently on a Kenyan Naval Base that housed US troops resulting in three US casualties show the group's willingness to expand outside of Somalia. However, there are indicators that some in the terrorist network remain committed to their original ideals of uniting Somalia, while other more hardcore members favor the expansion of Jihad globally. The linkage between Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda has a vulnerability, that if exploited, could hasten the demise of the relationship. Namely, Al Qaeda is an external

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<sup>102</sup> Shank, M. (2007). "Understanding political Islam in Somalia." Contemporary Islam 1(1): 89-103.

<sup>103</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D. (2009). "The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab." Middle East Quarterly.

organization comprised of few individuals of Somali origin, few individuals within clan structures, and few individuals who share aligned interests with Al Shabaab insurgents. The common bonds that nurture their relationship are an aversion to western encroachment and intervention and an aversion to western-defined concept of democratic governance.<sup>104</sup>

Defectors of the movement might serve as interlockers in beginning the process of negotiation and encouraging Al Shabaab to become part of the political process. As an example, in 2018 three days of large-scale protests in Baidoa followed the arrest of Mukhtar Robow a former al-Shabaab leader and presidential candidate of the Somali Southwest State, resulting in an unknown number of civilian casualties.<sup>105</sup> Robow defected from Al Shabaab and joined the political process as a candidate for president of the southwest state due to his popular support in the region. Former members of Al Shabaab like Robow might be the solution to beginning negotiations and bringing other Al Shabaab members back into the political process. The FGS should start negotiations while AMISOM forces remain in position to provide continued security. If AMISOM forces withdraw without agreements in place it is likely the FGS will find itself in a similar position as the Afghan government, negotiating with an insurgency that potentially enjoys popular support.

The recommended strategy of negotiations does not imply that there are not real concerns over Al Shabaab's ties to Al Qaeda and the potential for existential threats to US interests. The United States can support the negotiations process by maintaining

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<sup>104</sup> Nichols, Tim. Conversation with the Author, 18APR22.

<sup>105</sup> Oladipo, T. (2018). "Somalia violence: Deadly Baidoa clashes over Robow arrest." from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46566484>.

counter terrorism strike capability for elements of Al Shabaab determined a threat to US personnel or interests. Kinetic pressure might also provide a tool to keep the negotiations on track. The United States counter terror efforts should shift from kinetic targeting of Al Shabaab members to intelligence collection with the goal of understanding which members of Al Shabaab are fighting for the group's original ideals, and which members subscribe to Al Qaeda's global jihad. Determining which camp members fall into is critical to supporting the negotiations process and will allow the US and Somali partners to focus on severing the tie between Al Shabaab regional actors and Al Qaeda through psychological operations, deception operations, and information operations. The Al Shabaab threat is real and will likely continue until grievances are addressed, and the US should recognize the different camps within Al Shabaab and use military action against Al Shabaab only when near certainty of a threat to US interests is ascertained.

## **V. Conclusion**

From Sultanates to colonial authority, to democracy, to socialist dictator, to the Union of Islamic Courts, Somali society continues to search for peace. Identifying the historical, cultural, and religious factors important to Somali society and analyzing them through the framework of Social Fit does not solve Somalia's problems. However, Social Fit provides a mechanism for understanding what forms of governance might more likely succeed and what forms might perpetuate cycles of violence in society. Ideally, policy makers and practitioners should consider the ideological resonance, expectations of the social contract and comfort and familiarity of a society *before* acting diplomatically or militarily. The numerous attempts to bring stability and help Somalis

from external actors, while noble and well intentioned, should be modified to account for Social Fit, and if considered might improve progress over the long term. Social Fit, as it applies to Somalia, indicates that some form of an Islamist theocratic state is more likely to succeed in ending the cycle of violence. External actors should consider, is the oppression brought by such a state better than continued violence?

**LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AIAI	Al Ittihad al-Islami, Political Islamist Organization est 1980
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ARPCT	Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism
AU	African Union
BMA	British Military Administration (1941-1949)
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
IO	Information Operations
MILDEC	Military Deception Operations
NFD	Northern Frontier District (Kenya)
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
SNA	Somali National Army
SNM	Somali National Movement
SNF	Somali National Front
SNL	Somali National League
SPM	Somali Patriotic Movement
SRC	Supreme Ruling Council
SSDF	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
SYL	Somali Youth League (est 1943)
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
UIC	Union of Islamic Courts
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia



UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNITF	Unified Task Force
USC	United Somali Congress

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