

Supreme Revolutionary Council of Somalia: Harbinger of Social Injustice and Collapse of State Institutions

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Editor's note: Oct 21 marks the 44th anniversary of the Coup D'état of 1969 that brought to power General Siad Barre ending the multiparty-based constitutional Democracy in Somalia. Adan Makina takes us back to the events that took place during the authoritarian rule of the late Siad Barre and the ensuing collapse of the Somali state.

Introduction

This paper discusses the ethical and social justice issues that afflicted the Somali nation from 1969 to 1991 when the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) acted as the only political entity in the country. Two major aspects, ethics and social justice, that had been immensely undermined and abused by the state, plunged the Somali nation into its current state of statelessness. Ethics and social justice are two interrelated subjects that have been used interchangeably in legal matters and in social organization. At that time, Somalia, a country in the Horn Africa bordering Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, was ruled by a military regime that was headed by Major General Mohamed Siyad Barre. During SRC's height of power, the concepts of human rights, equality, justice, and liberty got trampled on by the revolutionary party thus affecting the lives of a homogeneous nation dominated primarily by peripatetic citizens whose livelihood depended on livestock raring.

Proclaiming independence and a pseudo-democracy in 1960, the first of its kind in Africa, after the merger of the northern British Somaliland protectorate and the southern Italian colony of Somaliland, Somalia's political freedom worsened after a military takeover in 1969. Nine years into democratic rule, the political landscape tilted toward military rule with the sudden assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. The subsequent coup d'état orchestrated by a junta comprising twenty-five military officers led to the dissolution of previous democratic and parliamentary institutions. The demise of democratization and the rise of militarism gave birth to socio-political injustices that included tribal hegemony, political irredentism, nationalization of private institutions, excessive corrupt practices, abuse of office, favoritisms and persecution of the clergy and political opponents. Sensing a power vacuum after the sudden departure of the assassinated president from the political spectrum, members of SRC resolved to massive sweeping operations that resulted in human rights violations. President Shermarke was gunned down by a close relative on October 15, 1969 while on a trip to the north of the country at Las Anod Airstrip (Mertz, 1992).

[Despite the SRC spearheading massive militarization](#) and improvement of state economic structures on a grand scale in its initial years of governance, the sudden turn of political events in the country accelerated the collapse of state institutions, consequently spearheading the disintegration of social equality and decline of economic freedom. Unethical running of state institutions by corrupt military cadres primarily from the SRC and their immediate relatives who espoused militaristic and authoritarian leadership styles opened a path for an atmosphere of disobedience, distrust, and recalcitrance. The absence of obligation to the citizenry (Cooper, 2006) brought about conflicting loyalties or conflicting obligations remorselessly revolving into a state of virulence. In this case, the SRC was to blame for the justification of state tyranny and propagation of rampant corruption committed in its name by the state machinery.

Scientific Socialism: Unethical and a Social Injustice

Somalia's new military leadership adapted scientific socialism, a system of authority akin to communism and borrowed from the amalgamation of the theories of Marx, Mao, Lenin, and Mussolini. According to Mendel (1966), as defined by Marx, scientific socialism implied "preaching in the garb of analysis". Contrary to Islamic teachings and democratic values, committee members of the SRC claimed that scientific socialism was commensurate with Islamic values and thus epitomized the self-help principle defined in Somali as "*iskaa wax u qabso*". The kind of socialism implemented by the SRC was in essence, as Flew (1995) put it in the words of Hayek (1976) as "entirely empty and meaningless". Upon taking the reins of power, SRC took to sweeping destructive measures that caused untold suffering to the mass. This included arbitrary

arrests of influential figures of the former government who were imprisoned in the infamous underground dungeons scattered all over the country. The revolutionary council used the dreaded National Security (NSS) to harass and intimidate members of select tribes that were considered a threat to the revolutionary structure and national sovereignty.

Killing Rampage

Public execution by firing squad of high-ranking public figures became common in Mogadishu. The execution by firing squad of ten Muslim scholars who denounced a presidential decree regarding the equality of women to men in Islamic law coincided with the United Nations General Assembly's declaration of the International Women's Year in 1975. This hasty execution of religious scholars without legal justification put the SRC in political limbo with Muslim scholars especially those from Arab nations denouncing the killings as unjustified and without merit. Killing of opposition candidates and arrest of innocent civilians without legal representation was widespread such that thousands of educated elites, fearing the junta's dreaded dungeons, sought refuge in neighboring countries, in the West, and in the Middle East.

Conflicting Loyalties

Censorship of publications that shed light on the regime's poor performance became common. The government controlled what to read and what not to read. The appalling human rights violations and excesses committed by SRC command forced the US, EU, and international human rights groups to call for sanctions and other military measures. The SRC's obsession with communism and the nation's leadership inclination to the Soviet Union inspired Somali leaders to brace shoulders with Russian, eastern European, Latin American, and Caribbean apparatchiks in Moscow, Havana, Berlin, and other communist hotspots respectively. Somalia switched sides by kicking out the Russians after the devastating 1977/78 war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region. Somalia and Ethiopia fought over this massive stretch of land in a brutal war that took the lives of thousands of innocent civilians and displaced perhaps an equal number. By the time the war ended, thousands of refugees settled in Somalia.

After ending the political imbroglio with the USSR, Somalia turned to the United States for military and economic aid. To ensure America filled the vacuum left by the Soviets, Somalia gave the US unconditional use of its Russian-built port in the town of Berbera overlooking the Gulf of Aden. In the early years of 1984 and at the height of the Cold War, the US, after signing contract agreement with the Somali Ministry of Defense, succeeded in overturning the declining

shape of the decrepit port and the ramshackle airport, which, at that time was reputedly considered to have been the longest runway in Africa. Writing in the New York Times, James (1995) argued that, “aid declined drastically as allegations of human rights abuses rose”. Driven by the desire to obliterate civil disobedience and silence all sorts of conceivable rebellion, the SRC used Berbera runway to catapult jet fighters operated by hired South African mercenary pilots in 1988 to carryout carpet bombings against the embittered northern Isaac clans who were up in arms for the sole purposes of reclaiming self-determination.

SRC Clan Composition

The SRC, the revolutionary movement that took over power after the assassination of President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, was composed of military cadres hailing from various tribes. Here is a breakdown of the names, ranks, and tribes of the twenty-five masterminds of the 1969 October Revolution.

Major General Mohamed Siyad Bare	President	Mareehan/Darod,
General Mohamed Aynaanshe	Vice President	Habar Yoonis/Isaaq
General Jama Ali Qorsheel	Vice President	Warsangeli/Darod
Brigadier Hussein Kulmiye	Member	Abgal/Hawiye
Major Ismail Ali Abokor	Member	Habar Jecllo/Isaaq
Lt. Col. Salt Gaber Kadiye	Member	Abgal/Hawiye
Lt. Col Mohamed Ali Samatar	Member	Tumaal
Lt. Col. Abdalla Mohamed Faadil	Member	Somali Yemeni
Lt. Col Mohamed Mire Muse	Member	Ogaden/Darod
Lt. Col. Mohamed Sheikh Osman	Member	Murursade/Hawiye
Lt. Col. Ali Matan Hashi	Member	Marehan/Darod
Mjor Ahmed Suleiman Abdalla	Member	Dhulbahante/Darod
Major Muse Rabileh Good	Member	Gadabuursi
Mjaor Farah wacays Dhule	Member	Isse
Major Mohamed Yusuf Elmi	Member	Habar Gidir/Hawiye
Major Mohamed Ali Shire	Member	Dhulbahante/Darod
Major Mohammoud Geele Yusuf	Member	Majerten/ Darod
Capt. Abdirizak Mohamoud Abubakar	Member	Majerten/Darod
Capt. Abdukadir Haji Mohamed	Member	Marehan/Darod

Capt. Mohamed Omer Jees	Member	Ogaden/Darod
Capt. Cabdi Warsame Isak	Member	Gaadsan/Dir
Capt. Ahmed Mohamed Adde	Member	Abgal/Hawiye
Capt. Osman Mohamed Jeele	Member	Hawaadle/Hawiye
Capt. Ahmed Hassan Muse	Member	Habar Jecllo/Isaaq

Source: Bulhan, H.A. (2008). *Politics of Cain: Politics of Cain: One Hundred Years of Crises in Somali Politics and Society*. Tayosan International Publishing.

The Incorruptible Mass

The mass' initial acceptance of the SRC materialized mainly because morally they were seen as incorruptible. Communism, military rule, coup d'état, authoritarianism, and pseudo-democracy were the norms in the African continent those days and it didn't matter to the subject who ruled, the nature of leadership, and where the leadership steered the nation. There was a sense of nationalism and loyalty to the corrupt leadership as the horrors of colonialism still echoed in the ears of the ordinary citizen. For the mass, nationhood and the love for autonomy prevailed over greed and grievance-two factors that are the cause of civil disobedience and governmental breakdown.

Perpetuation of Personality Cult

The cult of personality created and perpetuated by the Council spread unprecedented fear and emotionalism consequently conflicting with Somali social norms. Like hero worship, the cult of personality is described as, when someone, making use of vested authority and powers conferred on him, negatively embarks on spreading propaganda such that he becomes a figure seemingly worth worshipping. The use of mass media and propaganda allowed the SRC to achieve its aims and broader objectives. It is no secret that the SRC elevated its declining prestige to a level of worship equal to that of the monarchs and kings of aforesaid times. The president was regarded as the 'father of the nation' and 'victory bearer'.

Strong and Killingsworth (2011) argue that "Since the advent of mass communication, the allure of charismatic leadership and/or authority remains as strong as ever, in particular because it is the only form of legitimacy that 'combines massive usurpation with total consent giving' (p. 398)". Somalia's SRC leaders may have been charismatic for holding together violent and volatile tribal groups for over two decades though they veered off the path of equity and social justice in later years. The pharaohs of Egypt, the Aztecs of central Mexico, the Roman Empire, imperial Japan, and the dreaded Andean Inca of South America, all espoused the repugnant personality cult. Since the SRC treasured communism over other forms of governance, its leaders took pleasure

rehearsing to the mass radical ideas that were meant to transform or scare away both visible and clandestine antagonistic forces. The torchbearers of the revolution enlisted loyal subjects and the media to spread revolutionary desiderata. The demagoguery of personality cult has been recorded in the leaderships of Benito Mussolini, Nicolai Ceausescu, Adolf Hitler, Enver Hoxha, and Pol Pot, among others, where the making of emotional speeches to influence people was the hallmark to fame.

Social Division

SRC committed social stratification that elevated a sector of society while suppressing those found not to be towing the line. Likewise, social disintegration, tribal divisions, economic strangulation, and unwarranted political obscurantisms rose exponentially in some areas like the northern and eastern provinces leaving a portion of the country cut out from the rest of the country. Such infringements on the rights of the individual Somali citizen retarded the nation's economic status in the global economy ultimately leaving Somalia a pariah state lacking credible friends in the international community of nations.

Under General Barre, NGOs were prohibited (Marchal, Mubarak, Del Buono & Mozalillo, 2000) because they were considered as tools for hiding under clan umbrella. Barre's clan dominated all sectors of the economy and the military. The president's family enjoyed tremendous leverage over other clans in banking and other financial institutions such that members had fixed assets in the country and overseas trusts.

Aid earmarked for rejuvenating the nation's dwindling economy and for the underprivileged class ended in the pockets of the tops echelons of the party. Instead of opening the nation to the world, SRC espoused a policy of allowing a few tribal members to travel abroad for business trips, scholarships, and leisurely purposes. The department of immigration, headed by a close relative of the president issued passports through the use of favoritisms and kinship ties. Selection of heads of diplomatic missions and consular office representatives depended not on applicant merit and trustworthiness, but on factors related to subservience to the regime, closeness to a reputed figure, giving out bribes, or accepting party directives however unfavorable the terms may be.

Land Grabbing

Despite enjoying moderate climate and dependable arable land straddling the Juba and Shebelle rivers, Somalia became an aid dependent nation. The most corrupt nations enjoyed joint ventures

with the regime's top most fraudulent bureaucrats grabbing land belonging to poor riverine tribes living on the margins of the nation's only two perennial rivers that fall to the south of the country. Nations that had vested livestock, fishing, veterinary, and agricultural interests included Italy, Libya, the former Soviet Union, and Romania. Somalita, a joint Somali-Italian agricultural enterprise enjoyed exclusive rights to farming in the southern fertile lands producing bananas on a wide scale. Regardless of Italy's large scale agricultural produce in this part of Somalia, the area lacked basic infrastructure; towns were deficient in the acquisition of accessible water and sewerage systems; electricity was almost nonexistent; and the few existing medical facilities could not cope with the spread of diseases.

Protracted Theft and Underdevelopment

With the exception of the 500 km highway that connected Mogadishu to Kismayu in the south, the rest of the region was inaccessible especially during the rainy seasons when large tracts of land became flooded. The former Soviet Union unconditionally managed Las Kore Fishing Cannery in the east of the country. Much of the fishing produce was intended to feed Communist Russia's explosive population leaving Somalia's impoverished population with nothing except few employment opportunities. Despite Somalia having the longest coastline in Africa (Earth Trends, 2003), the ruling SRC failed rendering assistance to the few local fishermen fishing along Somalia's 3,898 km coastline to raise production. Fisherman plied the coastline using unreliable and dilapidated motorboats resulting in failure to meet consumer demands and consequently accelerating reduced fishing production. Instead, fishermen sold their catches to SOMALFISH, the only government industrial fishing monopoly in the country.

In another joint fishery cooperation known as SIADCO, Somalia and Iraq jointly operated four trawlers allowing Iraq to haul much of the Somali fish to Iraqi markets (Sonu, 1982). Despite generating millions of dollars from fishing and despite receiving millions of dollars in the form of grants and awards from friendly foreign governments, ordinary Somali citizens ended up receiving nothing in return to overturn the sorry state of the economy. In the absence of accountability, social justice, ethical considerations, and quality leadership, the feasible or tangible monetary gains generated from marine fishing ended up in private overseas accounts. Another joint venture known as RomSoma, a farming project implemented by the Government of Romania in cooperation with the Somali government, carried out low-level farming in the town of Balad, about 30 km from Mogadishu. This farming venture, according to Douthwaite (2003), applied *endosulfan*, a dangerous industrial chemical to eradicate the killer tsetse fly. However, the result was reduction in bird incubation and disappearance of various bee species from the

area. RomSoma and the repressive Somali regime may shoulder the blame for taking away agricultural lands that could have benefitted the residents of the town.

Conclusions

The SRC failed miserably in its political governance such that after twenty-one years of military rule, the country still remains in a condition described by the media and political scholars as ‘statelessness’. The problems created by the SRC could have been averted if the party followed constructively applied distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. The lingering political divide in the country was spearheaded by the party in power. Party apparatchiks had the responsibility to prevail over the spread of social inequality and social equity in the nation yet negligently left things to get out of hand. The elevation of some tribes over other tribes spearheaded hate and schisms of the greatest magnitude. A leader needs to be fair and impartial in his leadership quest. The SRC could have achieved success in the workplace if it had paid particular attention to fair social equity and social justice. One other factor the party leadership would have scrutinized carefully entailed keeping an eye on procedural justice which is determining job allocations. Because of widespread abuse in the workplace and absence of interactional justice, Somalia under SRC became a place where human dignity was not given the worth it deserved.

Despite abundance of natural resources and untapped mineral wealth, the plethora of social injustices and unethical misdeeds perpetrated by the SRC eventually left the Somali nation succumb to poverty and destitution and prolonged reliance on foreign aid. The underlying recurring cycle of violence evident in the country since the fall of the central government in 1991 may be attributed to the past injustices perpetrated by the irresponsible SRC bureaucracy and its oligarchic revolutionaries that malevolently fleeced the economy for selfish paltry gains. The international community’s adamancy in restraining the erratic double dealings of the SRC and its misguided ideological principles gave Siyad Barre and his confidants to tread a path of irreversible destruction. Lack of practicable human rights, justice, liberty, and equality undermined the party’s struggle to impose level governance.

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