

Strategic geopolitical history of somalia



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The strategic geopolitical history of Somali land not only indicates its importance to the early African kingdoms but has continued to so to this present day. It's positioned in the center of the Horn of Africa with an area of 637, 540 square kilometers and is ideally located at the crossroad not only to trade routes, but to the gateway of ancient and modernizing Africa.

Somali history dates back to the Paleolithic Age and Cave painting dating back to 9000 years BC has been recorded. Its location with Djibouti to the North West, Kenya to the south, Gulf of Aden on the north, Indian Ocean to the east, and Ethiopia on the west has added to its significance. In spite of its strategic location it has, unlike other African countries, no previous history of conquest, and as such, provided later European nations an excellent opportunity to experience other civilizations than their own- especially those of African Kingdoms.

Ancient Somalia is reported to have had trading relations with many of the mercantile nations during the middle Ages, and as a consequence positioned Africa as an important continent in the ancient world. Among others, cinnamon trade to Europe, especially to the ancient world of Rome and Greece was highly valued.

Most of the cinnamon was obtained from the East, especially India. Moreover since the Somali nation consisted of several Sultanates, it remained central to maritime and trading cultures of that period.

Known as the Kingdom of Punt in ancient times, it also had close relations with other important African kingdoms especially that of Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia. As a consequence, parts of Somali culture and forms often

resemble that of the pyramid-culture of Egypt and other near neighbors.

Strongly influenced by the Arab culture, this African society exhibits an extraordinary mixture of the two. Islam was brought to that part of the world around 825 A. D. Somalia's status on the African continent was also the result of its close relationship with the Ottoman and German Empires.

With the rise of the Arab world in the Middle East and its oil industry, Somalia continues to maintain its importance within this industry. It also remains influential in the Islamic world, enabling Somali to become a member of the Arab League in 1974. This country has also played an important and prominent role in the African Union which was formed very much in the tradition and design of the European Union.

Education is highly valued throughout Somalia although a higher education is still priority. It has several universities with the University of Mogadishu considered to be one of the finest in the country but also one of the best in Africa. Culturally, the Somalis are Muslims and as such traditional religious education is singularly important so that it is taught at a quranic schools across the country. Islamic literature produced by the Somalis is also well recognized in other parts of the Moslem world and so is their music and songs. Both the rural and urban societies are serviced through these religious schools.

The evolution of Somali legal structure as a mixture of Roman Dutch law and Sharia law. Currently it exercises civil law, religious and traditional law. Somalia consists of a number of clan based independent states.

Somali once boasted of a healthy economy within the formal and informal sector. Trade, commerce, transport and international links all promised of progressive future.. All this indicated that Somali are rapidly moving towards a modernizing society. Most of the West's multinational companies, for instance the manufacturing trade, multinationals and banks all have branches in the main cities in Somalia

Somalia has been rich in mineral resources and the recent find of substantial oil reserves has surged its status among the industrializing nations whose need for oil especially in the midst of the Middle East crisis is having a strong impact on its economy. Somalia has the largest army in Africa with 10, 000 troops on the field. Somalia has close on to 2 million people and 85% of them Somalis and the rest belonging to others. Of these 34% live in the cities. Arabic is the official language although English is spoken widely with some Italian. The Muslims belong to the Sunni sect of Islam. Christianity is minority religion.

When Imperialism swept over Africa for the last five or six centuries. It subjected the native people to ' inferior status' or second class citizenship. Africans weary of the harsh conditions the status brought on to them soon began to agitate. Clashes with Europeans became frequent, so much so the Imperialist nations gathered at the Berlin Conference in 1913 where the Western nations decided to carve out certain parts of Africa among themselves as ' guardians'. These imperial nations, especially the Portuguese, Britain, France, Germany and Italy were on the top of the list. One of the unintended consequences of such an act was to witness the

emergence of liberation groups, nationalism and people engaging in the 'freedom and liberation struggles' across the continent.

Muhammad Abdullah Hassan, a Dervish leader sent a clarion call across Africa to resist the British and end their rising influence. He was one of the early African leaders, to call for unity and independence.

Swept by the influences of decolonization and liberation struggles across Africa, Somalia provided unqualified support to the African National Congress of South Africa. Somalia in the meantime also had strong ties with Muslim countries and with their Islamic institutions.

Hassan, moreover as a Dervish leader, with his long experience with the British and Italian strategies of warfare, organized and disciplined his Somali army, both in their ability in ground battles and swift retreats using the terrain, with the result he defeated a well-trained British army. In 1920 however, with the introduction of airplanes into the battlefields, the British were able to defeat the Somali army finally. There after Somalia became a protectorate of the British Empire.

The Italians fared no better than the British in the beginning simply because the Somalis not only had the advantage of the terrain, but the 'brotherhood' within the Somalis and their allegiance to the Sultanate, provided their soldiers extra incentives during war against their enemy. They, however could not, in later years, match the armies of the Italians under the Fascist control in 1927.

Benito Mussolini, the Italian Fascist leader in 1935 attacked Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in the tradition of and continuing the legacy of imperialism and colonization, but this time the League of Nations (which later became the United Nations) condemned the invasion. Little was done thereafter to stop the occupation.

In around 1941 the British stationed in Kenya with the collaboration certain clans of the Sultanate, accompanied by East, West, and North African troops under the command of the British attacked the British held Somalia and Italian Ethiopia and defeated them. Britain ruled both parts and was later granted protectorate status, but the United Nation transferred the trusteeship of Italian held Somalia, back to Italians.

It was during the trusteeship period that the Somalis entered into the structural framework of Western political and international policy making. But in the process the Imperializing nations were depleting the economic wealth of Somalia. At times the British collaborated with Ethiopia in maintaining the hegemony over Somalia, all of which did not escape the various nationalist movements which were emerging in various parts of the country.

Djibouti's (French Somaliland) independence in 1958 showed Somalia the shifting geopolitics taking place in the area. But the referendum held in Djibouti however showed that the people had decided to ally themselves to France rather than Somalia. Somalia itself gained its independence in 1960, and formed the post- colonial state.

Unfortunately for the country at this time the numerous groups each wanted a share in the government? The hierarchy and power of the colonial system was now transferred to the new government. Rather than concentrate on the structural development of the country the government bureaucracy began to concentrate on personal power and wealth.

Many of the new government officials were chosen from the south and the Northerners felt left out and regional inequalities became the norm. 18 Parties participated in the first post colonial national elections in 1964 amidst accusation of corruption and fraud. The Somali Youth League, a Somali National Congress, and the Somali Democratic Union, united to form a strong block within the government. And unstable Somalia began to emerge for the next several years.

Abdullah Osman Daar became its first president. Power struggle continued, and finally in 1969 a military coup installed General Said Barre as President.

Barre's government introduced several new social programs especially in education, but otherwise parliamentary democracy seemed to suffer from internal strife. On October 15, 1969 President Abdirachii Ali Shermaarke was assassinated by a police chief.

At the beginning, General Said Barres's Supreme Revolutionary Council was welcomed by the masses of people. There was a belief amongst the population that Somalia would now have a stable government. Barre promoted what he called ' scientific socialism' as an ideology for his country. Notwithstanding his political rhetoric, Somalis soon began to experience

expropriation and corruption which was rampant during the imperialist times. Internal corruption and favoritism soon characterized Barre's government.

Clan rivalries and divide and rule policies also weakened the government. The final straw came when the military government sent troops to Ethiopia. The Soviet Union had been supplying arms to both sides. The Ethiopians successfully repulsed the Somalia army. By 1980 the Somali government was losing its credibility and at the same time an economic crisis, especially with the decline of trade and of the lowering of oil prices added to the desperate internal crisis.

Somalis also noticed under Barres government the National Security Courts were set up outside the legal system and directly under the control of the executive whose power came from the military. Any offence considered as a 'threat' to the national security as defined by the 'state' was considered a crime. Although this was finally abolished, and Somalia are still governed by pre-1991 penal code.

Civil war broke out in 1991. Northern Somaliland declared independence and in January 1, 1991 President Ali Madhi Mohamed of the United Somali Congress who had joined the Manifesto Group was made interim President. The rival groups soon united and refused to recognize Muhammad as their leader and president.

Throughout the 90s Somalia experienced civil conflicts and warfare resulting in food shortages, destruction of labor and general dislocation within the economy and welfare. Some 330, 000 civilians were at risk of death and starvation when Andrew Natsios, the head of the US agency for International

Development’ said before Congress, ‘ that Somalia was the greatest humanitarian emergency in the world’.

‘ For some time international observers allowed Somalia to disintegrate and it was only later when the country collapsed into anarchy did the United Nations send peacekeeping forces. United Nations peace forces were sent into Somalia through the United States. The Security Council set up their UN operation in Somalia(UNOSOM) but the UN forces came under attack. In 1983 the United Nations humanitarian assistance mainly given to the south did not sufficiently alleviate the crisis. The UN assistance ceased mainly due to the casualties suffered to its personnel. The EU also sent aid to the construct the port at the Berbera. European NGO’s also sent to aid and assistance to several parts of Somaliland.

Both the United States government under President Bush in the UN Security Council worked together with leaders in Somalia. The United Nations finally managed to get the elders and leaders at a conference at the Royal Palace in Addis Ababa. Unfortunately the peace negotiations failed and the Civil War continued.

The Transitional parliament adopted the federal charter in 2004. In 2006 the southern part of the country came under the influence of the Islamists who established an Islamic Court to function alongside civil authorities. Several parts of the country have declared’ independence’ and are controlled by warlords. The transitional federal government with the assistance of the UN reestablished its control over the territory but this has remained fragile to this day.