



**enough**

The project to end genocide and crimes against humanity

# Somalia

## Roots of the Crisis

Somalia remains synonymous with the concept of a failed state, and no country has struggled more profoundly with instituting even the basic structures of governance over the last several decades. Somalia's profound instability stems in part from conflicts between the state structures imposed during the colonial era and the clan structures which traditionally played a heavy role in the pastoral lives of Somalis. The 1991 overthrow of President Siad Barre ushered in a new era of conflict and anarchy. Warlords and armed factions have vied for political and economic dominance in the absence of a central government. Somalia has also frequently served as a proxy battleground for international actors, and ideologies stretching from Cold War American and Soviet realpolitik to current concerns about Islamic extremism.

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### The aftermath of colonialism

The Somali Republic was created in 1960 by merging the protectorate of British Somaliland with the colony of Italian Somaliland. Despite these colonial boundaries, ethnic Somalis, whose livelihoods are largely pastoral, have also lived for centuries throughout Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. The presence of these ethnic Somali populations has been used repeatedly by Somalia's neighbors to justify irredentist claims on Somalia's territory.

In 1969, Siad Barre took control of Somalia via military coup and declared it a socialist state. However when President Barre used Soviet military assistance to invade the Ogaden region of Ethiopia in 1977, the Soviet Union backed the Marxist regime in Ethiopia and Somalia was forced to turn to the United State for support. The influx of U.S. aid propped up Barre's corrupt regime but also increased resentment on the part of other Somali clans. Uprisings became common and, in 1991, clans opposed to the government overthrew Barre and seized Mogadishu.

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### Lawlessness and failed international intervention

Since 1991, Somalia has been without an effective central government. The clan-based militias that overthrew Barre descended into infighting and lawlessness, triggering famine and massive refugee flows in neighboring countries. In December 1992, this situation captured international attention and the United States, in cooperation with the United Nations, attempted to protect food aid from looting. However, the humanitarian objective of this mission became entangled in Somalia's civil conflict when the U.S. attempted to oust leading warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. This resulted in disaster when, in October 1993, Somali militias shot down two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters over the capital Mogadishu, and killed 18

American servicemen in a battle that also killed more than 1,000 Somalis. The U.S. withdrew by the end of 1993 and the UN followed in early 1995.

Northwest Somalia, which declared itself the independent Republic of Somaliland in 1991, has remained largely stable since the early 1990s but has never been recognized internationally.

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## Attempts at a political transition

Repeated attempts at peace talks and a political transition failed during the 1990s and early 2000s, and a low-level conflict between warlords and other militia groups simmered throughout this period. In 2004, however, peace talks resulted in the formation of a Transitional Federal Government, or TFG, led by President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed. Although intended to be a government of national unity that would preside over a political transition, the TFG actually represented only a narrow set of clan interests and lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many Somalis.

In 2006, a loose alliance of Somali businessmen and local Islamic courts emerged as a counterweight to the TFG. By June 2006, this entity, the Islamic Courts Union, or ICU, had defeated a collection of U.S.-backed secular militias and taken control of Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia. Although the ICU was able to establish a degree of security in Somalia unknown since 1991, it also aroused significant concern on the part of Ethiopia and the United States. Ethiopia feared rival Eritrea's support for the ICU and the ICU's support for Ethiopian insurgent groups. The United States suspected the ICU of harboring several al-Qaeda operatives linked to the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and worried about the rise of Islamic extremism in the region.

In December 2006, Ethiopian forces launched a cross-border intervention into Somalia, routing the forces of the ICU and propping up the TFG in Mogadishu. The United States provided intelligence and military support and launched air strikes against suspected al-Qaeda targets.

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## Emerging insurgency and humanitarian crisis

A small African Union peacekeeping mission was established in early 2007 to support the TFG, but the mission did little to curtail the emergence of a complex insurgency composed of both Islamic and secular militias hostile to the TFG. The heavy-handed and often indiscriminate counterinsurgency tactics of the TFG and Ethiopian forces further compounded the crisis, and more than 400,000 people were driven from their homes in Mogadishu during 2007.

By late 2007, open splits occurred inside both the TFG and the opposition. The appointment of Hassan Hussein Nur Adde as Prime Minister signaled the emergence of a moderate wing of the TFG open to negotiations. Likewise, the emergence of moderate leaders of the opposition Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia, or ARS, held out the possibility of a centrist coalition. In June 2008, a UN-brokered peace accord was reached between these elements in Djibouti. Sadly, the moderates on each side hold little sway over the more extreme armed groups, including TFG militias and the Shabaab insurgents.

By April 2008, fighting in Mogadishu had reached its worst in a decade – this amidst a severe humanitarian food crisis with 1.1 million people displaced from their homes and at risk of starvation. Almost half of the population, some 3.5 million people, will require food aid by the end of 2008. The worsening security and humanitarian situation garnered international attention due to the high profile rise in piracy in the strategic shipping lanes off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. The situation in Somalia remains dire. The TFG has imploded and controls minimal territory, hard-line Shabaab militants are on the rise, and famine looms. Given the severity of crises in Somalia and the extraordinary failures of international efforts to-date, a major reevaluation of U.S. policy is necessary.

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Enough is a project of the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Founded in 2007, Enough focuses on the crises in Sudan, Chad, eastern Congo, northern Uganda, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. Enough's strategy papers and briefings provide sharp field analysis and targeted policy recommendations based on a "3P" crisis response strategy: promoting durable peace, providing civilian protection, and punishing perpetrators of atrocities. Enough works with concerned citizens, advocates, and policy makers to prevent, mitigate, and resolve these crises. To learn more about Enough and what you can do to help, go to [www.enoughproject.org](http://www.enoughproject.org).

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