Overview

This seminar approached the crisis in Somalia not through the lens of immediate problems and policy prescriptions, but from a starting point concerned with political economy and historic patterns of violence, the societal impacts and accounts of violence, and comparative analysis of changing frameworks of governance and conflict associated with the end of the Cold War and the growth of global governance. By taking history, literature and political theory seriously, and seeing Somalia as an exemplar of wider patterns in the contestation over governmental power and resources, the seminar generated important insights into the country’s current predicament.

Events in Nairobi the week beforehand—the terrorist attack on the Westgate Mall by gunmen affiliated with al Shabaab—made the seminar uniquely timely. One of our participants was caught in the attack and narrowly escaped death; this brought home the immediacy of the issues under discussion.

Two principal inter-twined themes recurred throughout the discussions: (a) the instrumental politics of violence; and (b) the societal, cultural and personal impacts of violence, including the denial of violence.

Other key themes that emerged during the seminar were:

- The continuities in patterns of political violence from the late 1970s onwards, particularly its instrumental rationale for political entrepreneurship, but also the “key shift” in clan-based violence that occurred at the time of the collapse of the state;
• The paradox of the persistence of simplistic and primordialist clan-hate narratives, even while politicians routinely reconfigure their alliances across clan lines;

• The central role of resources, including both land and externally-derived rents, to power struggles;

• The societal repressed memory of the heinous acts committed in the past, notably during 1991 and the years immediately prior and subsequent, and the need for recognition, recounting and reconciliation;

• The tendency of international actors to address their own problems in Somalia, rather than Somalia’s problems, and the associated fallacy that defeating al Shabaab or establishing a recognized government would represent the most important contribution to resolving the Somali crises of continuing violence, political rentierism and instability;

• A narrow and uncertain roadmap for the future, charted by international actors and their Somali counterparts, which is founded on simplistic understandings of the past.

The Somali State and its Collapse

The violence of the Mohamed Siyad Barre regime (1969-91) should not be overlooked or minimized. Not only was Siyad’s repression and war the origin of much of today’s disorder and conflict, but those years have left a deep imprint on the country’s political state. Siyad used violence in several systematic and large-scale ways, focused on regime survival. But this violence also ushered in the country’s decay into disorder.

Siyad’s rule falls into two parts: up to 1977, when he was ostensibly a modernizer and nationalist, pursuing projects of social transformation, and unification of a greater Somalia; and from 1978, when he was concerned overwhelmingly with hanging on to power and eliminating growing challenges to his rule. There is controversy over whether Siyad was genuinely a modernizer in his early years, or simply a shrewd manipulator of whatever political opportunities arose, and whether he ever truly disregarded clan identities or was secretly obsessed with the threat from members of the Majeerteen elite. Similarly, there is debate over whether there is a significant difference in the political rationale for violence in these two periods, or whether “personal rule” or “sultanism” was an enduring feature of his regime, with the difference simply one of the kind and scale of violence his regime used. Mohamed Siyad was a master of presenting an image— and, in his earlier manifestation, seducing intellectuals into his modernizing project—while arguably maintaining an unchanged deep strategy.

From the outset, without doubt, Siyad was authoritarian, used violence, and violated human rights, initially utilizing the Communist models of targeted repression: torture, imprisonment and selective execution. The efficient use of state violence to purge the state apparatus and army was established by the mid-1970s.
After defeat in the Ogaden war and the first attempted coup, Siyad’s rule became increasingly corrupt and patrimonial. Although the coup plotters included members of different clans, Siyad quickly branded it as a Majeerteen coup, selectively executing Majeerteen officers, and creating the first episode of large-scale clan-based violence against civilians. This was followed a few years later by large-scale, clan-based and violent repressive measures against the Isaaq clan, following the formation of the Somali National Movement (SNM). At every step, the culture of political violence was further entrenched. In each case too, clan identities were hardened as a result of violence civilians suffered because of those identities.

**Politics instilled pervasive distrust and hatred that became fertile ground for incitement to large-scale violence against civilians after [Siyad’s] demise.**

Whether, as was believed at the time, the heights of Siyad’s state, including his security apparatus, were dominated by men of certain clan backgrounds or not, state institutions employed people of all clan backgrounds and his political patronage was purposefully bestowed on individuals of all clans. His was not a clan-alliance government but rather an authoritarian extended client system of patrimonial servants that used clan-divide-and-rule to keep the opposition divided and was cemented by extreme intimidation and remuneration, along with family connections. This persisted until the end. However, the rural insurgencies and counter-insurgencies became more and more organized on the basis of clan-based armies, while state institutions withered. To what extent state collapse had already occurred before the January 1991 denouement of the regime is a matter of debate.

Political and inter-clan violence long preceded Siyad’s rule. Old style regional feuds and raids were balanced by truces and intermarriage. However, by the final days of Siyad’s regime, his strategy of clan divide-and-rule, implemented through state violence, including large-scale clan-based violence against civilians, had led to an extreme politicization of clan segmentation. This remains one of Mohamed Siyad Barre’s lasting legacies, as his politics instilled pervasive distrust and hatred that became fertile ground for incitement to large-scale violence against civilians after his demise.

Finally, Siyad’s refusal to relinquish power even when his fate was clearly sealed, and his readiness to allow his top officials to loot the state—and to license young thugs to loot and terrorize—coupled with the absence of a program beyond clan-based identity ideology on the part of the USC leadership, set the scene for the bloodletting that accompanied his final political demise. By the time Siyad was expelled from Mogadishu in January 1991, any remaining state institutions a successor might have inherited had perished through dismantling from within or destruction by both sides in the conflict.

Among the discussion points raised was the impact of violence on governance. In the early years, Siyad could inflict violence on his adversaries without destroying the governing institutions: his aim was to replace the existing government machinery with a different apparatus under his personal control. Later, the violence destroyed the state from within. Another point was the different impacts of superpower
military assistance. While the Soviets and East Germans provided heavy arms and security officers, the U.S. provided small arms and turned a blind eye to how they were used. Finally, it is important to recognize that many Somalis experienced the state foremost as a dispenser of coercion and violence. There is little collective memory of fairer dispensation of power or of socially progressive state projects, leaving Somalis distrustful and fearful of state power and those who use it.

The collapse of the Somali state in 1991 was also related to a particular moment in world history, when attention was diverted to the Gulf (the U.S.-led operation against Iraq and its occupation of Kuwait began that same month), and when the consequences of neglecting to steward power transitions in weak states had not yet become fully apparent. During the Cold War, one or other superpower would have ensured that central authority was reconstituted. A few months later, in Ethiopia, the U.S. was determined that the collapse of the Mengistu regime would not result in a vacuum. In this sense, the Somali state collapse occurred at precisely the wrong moment.

**Societal Impacts and Narratives of Violence**

Much discussion in the seminar revolved around a historical and literary ethnography of the “clan cleansing” of 1991. Somali poetry and literature provide a rich account of the violence and destruction that accompanied the ending of Mohamed Siyad Barre’s rule in January 1991. Finding that these texts avoided discussion of responsibility for violence, Lidwien Kapteijns, whose book *Clan Cleansing in Somalia* focused our subsequent discussions, turned to political history for answers. This allowed her to construct an account of how state violence utilizing clan mutated into inter-communal violence, and how particular armed opposition fronts-turned-clan-based militias, which had been a modus operandi for both government and rebels in the late 1980s, mobilized civilians to engage in a clan cleansing of other civilians, co-opting civilians into all aspects of the war. This session reopened two important debates for Somalis and scholars of Somalia. First, it interrogated the idea of large-scale clan-based violence against civilians, contextualizing it in armed struggle for power, especially state power. Second, it reopened the debate on precisely why and when the Somali state collapsed—an eventuality that was not preordained in any way.

How did a particular set of clan antagonisms, one among many clan stories and hate-narratives that were available, become the most salient social schism? Although political divisions and alignment with the Barre regime had previously organized opposition, as the collapse of the state became imminent, political agency using large-scale clan-based violence against civilians made clan into the “master file.” Drawing upon the power of earlier clan-based grievances and political histories, ambitious leaders deployed large-scale violence against civilians in the name of clan identities and oppositions for their goal of seizing the state. Large-scale clan-based violence against civilians also reinforced clan identity as a frame for popular anger and pain. The logic/discourse of clan opposition escalated to reach its extreme, opposing the two (nearly) highest possible divisions of the Somali people—the Irir versus the Daarood—in 1991. As the United Somali Congress (USC) closed in on Mogadishu, its leaders used clan markers to obliterate the prior
political distinctions, acclaiming members of their own Hawiye clan family regardless of their erstwhile political affiliation, and rejecting, killing and expelling members of the Daarood clan family, even if they had taken a principled stand against the former government. The label of “leftovers” of the Mohamed Siad Barre regime was applied indiscriminately to members of the Daarood clans and became a code word justifying the violence against them.

All agreed that the clan-based violence was deliberately orchestrated, but opinions varied as to the motivation for this. One view was that the logistical and financial requirements of corralling inherently autonomous militia formations into a single army, far more rapidly than preferred military recruitment, training and organization would permit, pushed the USC leadership into opportunist exhortations to fight, kill and loot on the basis of clan identity. In this analysis, the clan conflict was a “coup gone wrong.” Another view was that USC-Caydiid intended to use large-scale clan-based violence against civilians as a vehicle for political power and to eliminate political alternatives, at least from the planning of the march on Mogadishu in 1989-90. There was no disagreement on the disastrous and far-reaching socio-political impacts.

The clan-based violence against civilians failed to deliver state power for either of the rival contenders for the leadership of the USC. Those leaders then mobilized or remobilized new clan-based alliances—always opportunistically utilizing the idiom of clan—to try unsuccessfully to defeat their rivals. New alliances formed, each associated with new rounds of violence organized along clan lines, and then again fragmented, during 1991-92. The coexistence alongside opportunistic shifting alliances, involving multiple combinations of lineage units, of conflict identities hardened by clan-based violence against civilians on an unprecedented scale (i.e. the campaign of clan cleansing) is an enduring feature of the Somali conflict of this period.

The question of the clan identities that came out of large-scale clan-based violence and the campaign of clan cleansing remains extraordinarily sensitive even 22 years after the first battle of Mogadishu. As Somali reactions to this debate show, to this day they have great difficulty in coming to terms and speaking frankly about what happened during this period.

The discussion of the violence of 1991 and how it is recounted—and repressed—today has important implications for Somali society and Somalia’s political future. The experience of past violence and how it is represented in popular narrative is one of the main determinants of whether and how Somalis relate to one another. Without a process of mutual recognition of one another’s sufferings, including the capacity to recount one’s own experiences, there is no prospect for national reconciliation.
Political Turbulence and Patterns of Ongoing Violence

Somalia has proved resistant to state rebuilding. The seminar examined this issue from several dimensions, including exploring a theoretical model for political authority among so-called “fragile states,” critically examining the case of Somaliland, and violence, resources and identity in the riverine areas of southern Somalia, and turning to current efforts at reconstituting legitimate authority.

A Theoretical Model: The Rentier Political Marketplace

Somalia may be an extreme example, but it is not alone as a country marked by shifting alliances and embedded violence—a pattern of turbulence in which politics is unpredictable over the short term, but recognizably structurally consistent over a longer period. Presented as the “rentier political marketplace,” this framework theorizes a political-economic analysis structured around the dynamics of bargaining over rental resources by intermediate elites, including elite members both inside and outside the state.

The Somali state and political economy, along with a number of other countries in Africa and the greater Middle East, underwent a profound structural transformation in the 1980s, and Somalis have been living with the under-recognized consequences ever since. At the time, this change had two particularly striking features. One was economic crisis, compounded by austerity measures demanded by international financial institutions, which meant that the basic structures of governance became financially unsustainable. The levels of resources available to governments meant that they simply could not sustain the basic functions of government, let alone build institutional states. Consequently, political elites turned to primary accumulation—looting the state and the country in order to stay in power and enrich themselves. The second was the beginning of the end of the Cold War, which meant that the coup maker could not count on automatic security backing from one or other superpower. Common to both of these changes was a sharp reduction in the discretionary budgets that rulers used to pay their armies and security services and to pay off intermediate elites. The framework suggests that the collapse in the “political budget” was the cause of state crisis in many African countries, of which Somalia was an extreme and illuminating case.

The cashflow to the political budget is the heartbeat of a rentier patronage state. It is this top-down flow of resources, managed by the ruler in accordance with a political-business plan, which determines regime survival. Moreover, under a patronage-based regime, the army is not a rule-bound institution loyal only to the state, but rather a patrimonial hierarchy in which orders are not dutifully enforced, but are negotiated. In the 1980s, Somalia was a security rentier state, and because guns were more readily available than cash, due in large part to the rental agreement with the U.S. for the Berbera air base that provided the government with small arms, Siyad’s business plan leaned more to using violence than financial incentives.
The classic Tillyean model for European statebuilding consists of a ruler who dominates the means of violence bargaining with agrarian and commercial elites who control (most of) the resources. In Africa’s rentier systems—a characteristic accentuated as the continent began its economic recovery, initially imperceptibly, in the 1990s and 2000s—the ruler commands most of the resources. Also, as provincial elites (tribal leaders, militia and rebel commanders) often control extensive armaments, and as national armies and security services are themselves fragmented with a high degree of command and financial autonomy at lower levels, the ruler does not possess anything close to a monopoly of control over the means of violence. This stands the Tillyean model on its head. Rather than the state as a protection racket, negotiating the terms of taxation, governance became an extortion racket, with armed intermediate elites bargaining for a share of the rents, and commonly using violence as a tool of bargaining.

The central task for a ruler in Africa and the Greater Middle East is not state building but simply remaining in power in a country consisting of diverse communities. In this regard, a better model is provided by long-lived imperial systems, such as the Ottoman Empire. Key to maintaining power was that the ruler could control the infrastructure of communication and convening, and thereby set the terms of bargaining. This created a highly imperfect market in patronage, with a slow pace of bargaining over access to state power. Power structures resembled a hub and spokes, with no rim. The advent of telecommunications has transformed control over the communication and convening capabilities. Provincial elites in the “rim” can now communicate with one another, with external patrons and with their constituents, and can do so at great speed. The former slow pace of political bargaining is replaced by near-instant re-negotiation of any agreement signed.

What, in such a turbulent and poorly-regulated system, creates incentives for honoring contracts? Clearly, any enforcement mechanisms will be weaker than if enforcement is carried out by institutions or by a Leviathan. Elements such as reputation, kinship and a common religious code may be important—underscoring the importance of Islam and the Somali lineage system or clan template as factors in facilitating governance and rule of law in societies that function with weak or non-existent formal governing institutions.

**Political Authority and Violence in Somaliland**

During the crisis and collapse of Somalia, the stability and cohesion of the self-declared Republic of Somaliland has been a source of interest and controversy, apparently holding out an alternative model of successful state-building led by domestic social actors, with no international recognition, and modest support. A conventional explanation is that it was a benign process of reconciliation led by Somaliland’s
elders, drawing on their social authority and wisdom, creating a unique hybrid of traditional and modern forms of governance. The seminar explored and questioned this interpretation.

The history of Somaliland since 1991 is complex and troubled, and provides a basis for a useful engagement with some of the key theoretical and comparative precepts of the seminar. The military and political evolution of the SNM from the early 1980s to the 1991 declaration of independence was critical to the later emergence of the Somaliland state. In particular, the war of 1988 transformed the SNM from a force constituted by professional soldiers aiming to build a national movement against the regime, to a much larger and more irregular clan-in-arms. That process helped give birth to some of the institutions, such as the council of elders (guurti) that later played a central role in the evolution of the state.

Somaliland underwent a succession of wars during 1991-94, beginning with the conflicts that fractured the SNM and brought the territory to near collapse in mid-1992, and continuing with the wars conducted during the first years of Mohamed Ibrahim Egal’s presidency. The initial consolidation of a government was possible because of the military supremacy of the SNM, alongside the absence of any viable political-military alternatives, the subsequent wars, a shared sense of identity among residents, and the role played by the business class, which was crucial to the consolidation of executive power. Thereafter, while Somaliland may be seen to have a robust governmental authority in Hargeisa, Berbera and Burao—the heartland of the Isaaq—its degree of control slopes off sharply in peripheral areas, most notably in the east, outside the Isaaq areas.

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**Somaliland’s experience of war indicates that its state-building experiment has been less benign than is often asserted.**

The result has not been liberal democracy, but a form of inclusive and moderated patrimonialism—with some clear limits and perils. Somaliland’s political difficulties indicate that while it is an example of positive deviation, it still resembles generic models of African state authority.

The Somaliland case allows us to pose the question of whether it follows what Charles Tilly describes as a model of “war making the state”? Somaliland’s wars show that armed conflict need not be “development in reverse,” and can be central to processes of state consolidation. While not creating a tight administration and centralized army, these conflicts did help establish a shared political community and—led by shrewd politicians—also strengthened the capacity of the government. By the same token, Somaliland’s experience of war indicates that its state-building experiment has been less benign than is often asserted. The overall answer to the Tillyean question would appear to be that different kinds of wars, or components of violence, under different conditions, contribute to making different kinds of state or political order.
Clan, Race and Resources in the South

In the Jubba Valley, villagers from Somalia’s farming minorities—who are outside the main clan system—have experienced multiple varieties of violence over the decades.

In the 1980s, violence in the Jubba Valley was underpinned by a mythical narrative of the racial superiority of ethnic Somali pastoralists over the minority farmers, and compounded by a state-backed, foreign funded land reform program that facilitated a large-scale land grab. Ethnic Somalis who were urban-based businessmen and/or with ties to the Barre government used their networks to obtain land titles to Jubba Valley land for which they held no previous claims, either dispossessing or promising to dispossess Jubba Valley farmers whose prior land claims were ignored in the enactment of the land reform law. Not only was land a key resource, but obtaining titles to land also provided an opportunity to obtain access to loans and anticipated development assistance. The creation of the Ministry of Jubba Valley Development signaled the plan for massive development projects in the valley, to be funded by foreign assistance. On the ground, immediate violence occurred in face-to-face interactions in which pastoralists abused farmers with impunity, and in land alienation in which urban businessmen and politicians from ethnic Somali clans could take control of land farmed by Jubba Valley villagers.

In 1991, this violence shifted. The valley became a locus of military contestation, all the way from Kismayo to the Upper Juba. Many of the minority farming communities made the political error of taking seriously the liberation rhetoric of the USC-Caydiid and of siding with them. The so-called “liberators” then disregarded the minorities, and often attacked and looted them. Subsequently when the rival clan-based factions—including many aligned with the old order—drove out the “liberators,” the minorities were once again subject to violent interventions in the form of revenge. Also, armed local pastoralists, emboldened by the collapse of the Barre government and, in some cases, alliances with organized militias, began to assert control over Jubba Valley villages by either claiming a percentage of all harvests or by taking over land wholesale, abrogating patron-client relationships that many farmers had assumed were operative, and violating the implicit mutuality of relations. In some parts of the valley, minority farmers were reduced to landless laborers, sometimes forced laborers.

Later, as al Shabaab gained power, violence was yet again inflicted, with the aim of imposing a new cultural order and destroying contending potential power bases. The advent of al Shabaab introduced a new pattern of violence, not based on clan identities or oriented towards gaining access to international rent (excepting that from transnational jihadist networks).
Finally, the preference shown by outsiders to work with clan-based political leaders, who tend to frame themselves as counter-terrorist allies partly in order to gain access to international sources of security assistance, has the potential for unleashing new violence. The prevalence of hate-speech, including frankly racist commentaries on Somali websites, indicates that some in the diaspora remain animated by old stereotypes, with obvious fears for what this may entail on the ground for minority groups. The land disputes arising from the overlain levels of land seizure and contestation, which became dormant during the period of al Shabaab territorial control, are already re-emerging as a focus of conflict.

Overall, there are both clear continuities and disruptions between state and post-state violence in the Jubba Valley. While patterns of violence are changing, there is no indication that violence is likely to subside, and indeed should the Somali Federal Government and its regional and international allies triumph over al Shabaab, it is quite possible that older patterns of violence would return.

Current Violence

The seminar examined the current deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali Federal Government (SFG) forces, in their efforts to defeat al Shabaab. One of the challenges facing AMISOM is that it operates under an agreement with the SFG which—as a member state of the AU and UN—is the overall authority. Although created before the emergence of al Shabaab, and originally intended as a small force, AMISOM has become a much larger operation and is specifically targeting al Shabaab. AMISOM is therefore not operating in support of an international peace process, but rather as an international auxiliary to support the SFG. In fact, the SFG relies more on AMISOM than its own troops.

The AMISOM concept of operations required a force of 35,000 men, but to date troop contributors have supplied just half that number (17,731) due to resource constraints. Sustaining AMISOM’s strategy therefore requires international support to Somali military forces, comparable to AMISOM, a supply of enablers and force multipliers (specifically helicopters), and for Ethiopian forces to remain in the areas where they are stationed. Al Shabaab has withdrawn from many locations but continues to utilize asymmetrical tactics, rather than trying to retake territory. The principal military means used by AMISOM and the SFG is conventional assault to take territory, especially roads and towns, but in one sector, the Djiboutian troops have adopted a population-centric approach which appears to be effective in denying al Shabaab an operating base among the population.

Despite its reverses, al Shabaab should not be underestimated. It continues to have a presence, including in Mogadishu, and collects taxes. It has followers even within government institutions and (especially) private military companies. It seeks to create a popular sentiment that the current SFG order is fragile and

[Al Shabaab] seeks to create a popular sentiment that the current SFG order is fragile and transitory, while al Shabaab itself is there to stay.
transitory, while al Shabaab itself is there to stay. Hence, people make accommodations with it in order to safeguard their longer-term prospects.

Also, in those areas where al Shabaab has been rolled back, old issues re-emerge. These include clan rivalries, political conflicts, and most particularly, disputes over land ownership which regularly resurface. The SFG is also trying to centralize control, especially over revenues, contrary to the spirit of the Federal Constitution. Disputes over power and resources in the Jubba Valley point to a resurgence of older issues of contention. However, the primary goal of the SFG and AMISOM is the military defeat of al Shabaab. A related challenge is that while the problem in Somalia is political first, and military second, the overwhelming majority of resources are directed to the military effort and not to seeking a political solution. Should the extremist faction within al Shabaab be defeated, it will raise the opportunity to inject some politics of reconciliation into Somalia.

The regions are acting in diverse ways. Puntland had received international assistance to counter piracy which it has used effectively, showing how security cooperation rents can be utilized ably. Having earlier obtained funds from piracy, Puntland leaders recognize there is more to be earned, and other benefits to be gained, from anti-piracy cooperation. Jubbaland faced a political and security crisis, in large part because of the divergent interests of Ethiopia and Kenya, which has been addressed, but the question of the authority of the region vis-à-vis the Federal Government remains a point of contention. Each region, for instance, is seeking its own access to the sea, in order to obtain its own port revenues.

Concluding Reflections and Prospects for the Future

Participants in the seminar were at best cautious, at worst outright skeptical, about the prospects for the SFG and the “new deal” for Somalia. The principal outcome of the seminar was a reflection on the value of deep, case-specific scholarship, framed by comparison and theory, for understanding Somalia and for informing policy and practice. The seminar also reflected an important, across-the-board improvement in the expertise and balance with which Somalis talk about their situation. The challenge is for this increased understanding of the Somali predicament to be translated into improved policies. Among internationals, there continues to be a powerful tendency for Somalia to be seen through the lens of the particular international concern of the moment, and for policy responses to be geared towards addressing that particular international problem with Somalia, rather than addressing the problems of Somalia per se.

Among the concluding observations were the following:

- The importance of the international community recognizing that there is more to governing Somalia than defeating al Shabaab, and recognizing that the problems that gave rise to al Shabaab will persist, perhaps even be exaggerated, in the event of the SFG inflicting decisive military defeat on al Shabaab.
The main immediate challenge for the SFG and President Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud is to turn the current constitution into a reality, and to move away from a search for rents and resources to an inclusive process of building consensus among Somalis, including outreach from the center to the regions. The formation of the SFG is a beginning only, and the process of reconciliation has yet to start.

A process of national reconciliation, including a mechanism that enables all to recount their experiences and to recognize the validity of the accounts of others, is an essential part of constructing a viable Somali political community.

Somalia exhibits a long history of large scale violence against civilians for instrumental purposes. Over the decades, there have been important changes in the patterns of violence, some determined by international factors such as the end of the Cold War and the growth of global communications, and some by specific Somali exigencies such as the invocation of clan for the purposes of political entrepreneurship. The nature of authoritarian politics and the state has also changed in fundamental but ill-understood ways, symbolized by the fact that while Mohamed Siyad Barre took power bloodlessly in a single day, it has taken 35 years of violence to remove him and find a successor—still without success. Somalia is an extreme but revealing case of a wider phenomenon of the post-Cold War era.

Somalia has, over the last 22 years, a rich comparative experience of building governance structures, with varying outcomes. The achievements of Somaliland and Puntland are to some degree an outcome of political intent by key actors, but also have much to do with circumstance and unintended but favorable outcomes. Business acumen and innovation among the population have contributed to the relative stability in Somaliland and Puntland.

The Somali clan system provides a repertoire of identities which can be drawn upon for various political projects. In modern times these have ranged from pan-Somali nationalism to mutually-obsessive paranoia between key leaders, framed in terms of clan identity. Specific identity markers can be activated based on political configurations, and while immutable clan blocs appear to have been socially constructed, practical politics exhibits enormous flexibility—clan discourses appear unchanging, but political biographies show persistent pragmatism. One consequence of this is that any political system—such as the federal constitution—should not reify a presumed clan structure, because we do not know how that system will change in the future. We should be alert to the ways in which identities can serve rentier purposes, attracting external resources in support of particular political projects that might not be favorable for a resolution of conflict.

The deeper implications of large scale violence on the Somali people need to be understood better. The origins and implications of the clan-based hate narratives are an important subject of study by scholars and reflection by Somalis. However, violence, and the narratives that are constructed around

November 2013
violence, also have social, cultural and psychological implications that range beyond the instrumental calculations of any political leader.

• One of the consistent features of international policy in Somalia, is that it reverts to a standardized model of conducting business, which is providing assistance to favored clients for immediate security and political favors. Moreover, recent international policy towards Somalia appears to be becoming overly rigid. Previous approaches to governance showed some flexibility, but today these have been abandoned in favor of intrusive regulation of governmental action. Thus far, there is reason to fear that the “new deal” for Somalia is little more than a euphemism for external control over SFG policy, restricting the role of the government to be akin to a latter-day “native administration” or “indirect rule.”

• In its interactions with Somalia, the international community—including its aid policies and political priorities—is unpredictable over the short term, giving rise to low levels of confidence in its policies among Somalis, and a wait-and-see attitude.