

# Analysis

## Vicious circles and the security development nexus in Somalia

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*The metaphor of the vicious circle is deeply embedded in analysis of protracted conflicts. Yet in at least some instances conflicts that appear to be self-reinforcing in the short term are in the longer run producing conditions out of which new political orders can emerge. These protracted conflicts are thus dynamic, not static, crises and require post-conflict assistance strategies that are informed by accurate trend analysis. The case of Somalia is used to illustrate the dramatic changes that occur over time in patterns of armed conflict, criminality, and governance*

*in a collapsed state. These changes have produced a dense network of informal and formal systems of communication, cooperation, and governance in Somalia, helping local communities adapt to state collapse, manage risk, and provide for themselves a somewhat more predictable environment in which to pursue livelihoods. Crucial to this evolution of anarchy in Somalia has been the shifting interests of an emerging business community, for whom street crime and armed conflict are generally bad for business.*

### *Introduction*

The dominant, often implicit metaphor framing policy discussions about the security-development nexus in post-conflict settings is the vicious circle.<sup>1</sup> The logic behind this metaphor is compelling. Endemic insecurity blocks progress in economic rehabilitation

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and recovery. The lack of economic recovery and employment opportunities in turn impedes demobilisation and reinforces criminality and armed conflict. In short, predation breeds poverty, poverty breeds predation. Likewise, underdevelopment contributes to state failure by depriving governments of necessary tax revenues to be minimally effective, which in turn stymies economic recovery. State failure produces economic collapse; economic collapse perpetuates state failure.

Most of the discourse on contemporary post-conflict assistance reflects this view of war-torn countries caught in a tangle of vicious circles, with failure reinforcing failure, trapping countries in a downward, potentially perpetual spiral of crisis. The recent World Bank study *Breaking the Conflict Trap* identifies several ‘negative feedback mechanisms’ which help explain the high degree of conflict persistence. It concludes that

*[w]ar retards development, but conversely, development retards war. This double causation gives rise to virtuous and vicious circles. ... When development fails, countries are at a high risk of becoming caught in a conflict trap in which war wrecks the economy and increases the risk of further war.<sup>2</sup>*

In development studies, the vicious circle metaphor is a time-honoured concept. Orthodox economic development theories in the 1950s made the case that low savings, low investment, and low productivity constituted a vicious circle in poor countries. The same vicious circle logic has dominated discussions of domestic poverty in the US and other affluent countries, where poverty and broken families, poverty and crime, and poverty and cultures of dependence are all presented as self-reinforcing phenomena collectively contributing to ‘the poverty trap’.

The notion that the dynamics of complex political emergencies are or can be self-reinforcing, and that the crises themselves are therefore self-perpetuating, is powerful on several counts. First, it appears to offer the best explanation for the intractability of so many contemporary instances of civil wars and state collapse, a phenomenon that is otherwise very difficult to explain.<sup>3</sup> The principal alternative explanation—the neo-realist claim that parties to these protracted conflicts have yet to reach a hurting stalemate which would make them ‘ripe for resolution’—is unconvincing when one surveys the extraordinary levels of destruction and misery these crises have produced.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the vicious circle argument offers a more sophisticated understanding of the complex, mutually reinforcing causes of conflict and underdevelopment than the more

simplistic, linear approaches,<sup>1</sup> which so often inform and undermine post-conflict assistance projects aimed at demobilisation or post-conflict rehabilitation.

Third, the vicious circle metaphor dovetails nicely with an increasingly popular explanation of protracted conflict, the 'political economy' theory of post-modern wars. This school of thought contends that many contemporary civil wars are perpetuated by local and external actors with interests in maintaining an environment of 'durable disorder' from which they profiteer via pillaging, extortion, monopolisation of lootable resources, and other criminal activities.<sup>5</sup> For certain conflict constituencies (ranging from warlords to merchants of war to teenaged gunmen), armed clashes, lawlessness, and collapsed state authority are not crises to be overcome but desired outcomes providing opportunities for livelihoods, fortunes, and prestige which would be impossible in a context of peace and rule of law. Whether or not the bulk of the population is war-weary is irrelevant if spoilers are willing and able to block reconciliation. 'Loot is not the root motivation for conflict' the World Bank observes, 'but it may become critical to its perpetuation, giving rise to the conflict trap.'<sup>6</sup> Political economy of war theories are not necessarily wedded to the claim that contemporary civil wars are self-perpetuating, but tend to lend themselves to that conclusion by emphasising the vested interests of violence entrepreneurs in a wartime economy.

The policy implications of this line of argument are stark. It not only propels development work far beyond conventional sectors such as health and education and directly into work in security sector reform, demobilisation, and 'good governance'—a shift in agendas which observers like Mark Duffield describes as a 'radical' departure from the past.<sup>7</sup> It also suggests that most conventional post-conflict assistance (which tends to be project-oriented, sequential, sectoral, and informed by only an elemental understanding of the causes of conflict) appears entirely under-equipped to take on the massive, complex task of breaking the political and economic vicious circles reinforcing the conflict trap. As Peter Uvin observes, post-conflict assistance in its present form tends to involve 'small, scattered, under-funded, short-term, un-coordinated projects, none of which makes a major difference.'<sup>8</sup> However, while most observers concur with Uvin that the current approach to post-conflict aid is entirely inadequate for the mission, there is much less consensus on alternatives. One pessimistic school of thought argues that the task of breaking the vicious circles fuelling civil wars simply exceeds external capabilities. Attempting to do so, these analysts argue, amounts to a fool's errand. A more optimistic school of thought, to which the World Bank subscribes,

acknowledges that while nation-building is very difficult, a more strategic, informed, and committed approach to post-conflict assistance can ‘cumulatively make a substantial difference’ in breaking the vicious circles perpetuating civil wars.<sup>9</sup> This requires a major commitment of time and funding and in some cases an unprecedented level of intervention into conflict-ridden countries.

For the moment, this debate has been resolved by the war on terror and the now-dominant view that, left unaddressed, failed states are a potential safe haven for terrorists.<sup>10</sup> Once discussion of post-conflict assistance was effectively ‘securitised’ after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the theoretical and empirical question of whether nation building *can* work has been eclipsed by the political assertion that nation-building *must* work.<sup>11</sup>

If any country qualifies as an illustration of the conflict trap, it would appear to be Somalia. Somalia has been a zone of complete state collapse since 1991. There is at present no functioning central government, no reconciliation, little security, endemic armed conflict, high levels of criminality, high unemployment, extremely low levels of human development, and an economy which stays afloat principally on the half-billion or more dollars in remittances which annually flow back from the large Somali diaspora. Moreover, the country proved impervious to the one of the most ambitious nation-building efforts in the post-Cold War era—the massive, multi-billion dollar UN peace operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) in 1993–95, which ended in failure.

Yet a close analysis of Somalia over the past fourteen years reveals something unexpected from an allegedly textbook case of self-perpetuating crisis. Somalia’s triple legacy of state collapse—endemic armed conflict, lawless criminality, and absence of formal central government—has changed significantly since 1992. These changes hint at the possibility that the very forces which seem to be perpetuating Somalia’s crisis are also serving as midwife to emerging new political orders which are making the country somewhat more predictable and less conflict-ridden than in the past. That violence continues to feature prominently in these emerging new orders is indisputable, but it is a more controlled violence, a far cry from the anarchy that plagued Somalia in 1991–92.

This article draws on the Somalia case to argue that in at least some instances protracted conflicts are not self-perpetuating crises but rather evolving, ‘emerging political complexes’<sup>12</sup> within which political and social changes are driven by the evolving interests of key local actors ranging from political elites to local militiamen. Understanding how and why the interests of local actors can shift over time is thus a

critical ingredient in fashioning post-conflict assistance and interventions, a point which this article illustrates through a close examination of instances of successful demobilisation in Somalia.

The claim that interests in war economies can change over time, and that those interests can reshape the trajectory of protracted crises in ways that offer opportunities for new political orders, is not to deny the existence or significance of vicious circles in places like Somalia, but rather to reinterpret them. A more apt metaphor for crises like Somalia is the cyclone, a destructive, dynamic storm that feeds off itself in the fashion of a vicious circle, but in the process alters its own environment in ways which can eventually weaken if not extinguish it.<sup>13</sup>

### *The changing nature of Somali's collapsed state*

Somalia's long-running crisis of state collapse is best understood by disaggregating its three components—armed conflict, lawlessness, and collapse of the central government. As will be seen, these three factors tend to constitute a 'syndrome' of state collapse, but upon closer examination are distinct crises that can and do enjoy separate trajectories.<sup>14</sup> All three have changed significantly since 1992.

### *Collapse of the central government*

The most unique aspect of the Somali crisis has been the protracted collapse of the central government. There has been no functional, central governing authority in Somalia since January 1991, making Somalia the longest-running instance of complete state collapse in contemporary history. Attempts to revive a central state have been both numerous and unsuccessful. The most promising effort was the Transitional National Government (TNG), which was formed in August 2000 but which never became operational during its three-year mandate.<sup>15</sup> Even at the regional, district, and municipal level, formal administrations that have periodically popped up throughout the country have tended to have relatively short shelf lives.

The fact that efforts at state-building and national reconciliation have failed so consistently for more than a decade has made it easy for observers to conclude that politics and governance in Somalia remains mired in anarchy. However, a closer look at Somalia reveals an impressive if fragile level of local governance. Collectively, these developments do not add up to anything resembling a conventional state. Nonetheless, the

mosaic of local polities and informal social pacts that have evolved in post-state Somalia does provide Somali citizens with variable levels of 'governance,' if not 'government'.

The most visible manifestations of sub-national governance in Somalia are the formal, self-declared administrations existing at trans-regional, regional, district, and municipal levels. One such polity, the secessionist state of Somaliland in the north-western corner of the country, has by some measures performed better than a number of recognised sovereign states in Africa. Since 1996, it has provided modest levels of administration, maintained a level of peace and rule of law that few neighbouring states can match, survived a constitutional succession upon the sudden death of the President, and most recently held local and national elections.

Although none can come close to matching Somaliland's achievements, a number of other regional and trans-regional authorities have come into existence in the past seven years. Puntland, a non-secessionist, autonomous state in the arid northeast corner of the country, has assumed very modest governmental functions. In Kismayo, the Jubba Valley Authority (JVA) has kept the peace and facilitated an increase in import-export activities in that troubled port city. Elsewhere, the Rahanweyn Resistance Army's (RRA) administration of Bay and Bakool regions in 1998–2002 and the Benadir Regional Authority in 1996 showed some initial promise before collapsing. Most though not all of these regional and trans-regional polities are or were essentially clan homelands, reflecting an impulse to pursue a 'Balkan solution' or, more appropriate to the Somali context, 'clanustans'.

The interests that helped bring these regional states into existence vary from case to case. In the case of Somaliland, powerful commercial interests in maintaining a secure environment for trade out of the all-weather seaport at Berbera were a vital source of financial support for the nascent Somaliland state. In addition, the strong desire of most of the Isaaq clan to secede from Somalia following years of repression and wartime atrocities galvanised public support for a state of their own. In Kismayo, the Jubba Valley Alliance has maintained a modicum of order strictly in order to profit from a monopoly on trade through the city's all-weather seaport. The JVA is composed of outside clan militias that are essentially an occupying force in Kismayo, and hence do not represent any kind of local initiative to return rule of law to the area. Most other regional states were created more by political rather than economic motives. Specifically, a number of regional states were established by political leaders hoping to use their position as 'president' or 'governor' of that polity as a springboard for a position in a

future national government, and to secure greater recognition and resources from external actors inclined to favour regional authorities over self-declared factions.

The most dramatic change in governance in Somalia since 1992 has come at the neighbourhood or municipal level. Although these local polities have attracted the least amount of external support, they have produced the most actual day-to-day governance in Somalia, and they are a reflection of local communities' attempts to provide core functions of governance in a context of state collapse.<sup>16</sup> In the immediate post-UNO-SOM period, this 'radical localisation' of politics tended to manifest itself mainly in informal, overlapping polities loosely held by clan elders and others.<sup>17</sup> Over the course of the second half of the 1990s, these local polities often became more structured and institutionalised.<sup>18</sup> The most common manifestation has been a coalition of clan elders, intellectuals, businessmen, and Muslim clergy to oversee, finance, and administer a *sharia* court. These coalitions are themselves shaky, laced with tensions over power and resources, but when conditions are right, these groups are able to work together in common cause to cobble together a modest judicial and law enforcement structure. The *sharia* courts appear to come and go in cycles, and are currently in what appears to be a renewed phase of ascendance following a decline during 1999–2001, a re-emergence linked to the failure of the TNG and the related rise of insecurity.

In some locations, local polities do more than simply keep the peace via a *sharia* court. They also have managed to provide some basic services, operate piped water systems, regulate marketplaces, and collect modest levels of taxes and user fees that cover salaries. Typically, these successful municipalities have been led by dedicated, professional mayors working closely with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), clan elders, and businesspeople. As with the *sharia* courts, effective municipalities have enjoyed enormous popularity in the local community, but have also proven to be vulnerable to the machinations of warlords and jealous politicians and to the vagaries of clan tensions.

What has emerged in Somalia by way of governance in the past decade has not so much resembled the 'jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous and anarchic regionalisms' depicted in Robert Kaplan's famous 1994 portrait of failed states,<sup>19</sup> but rather a loose constellation of commercial city-states and villages separated by long stretches of pastoral statelessness. In the towns, the *sharia* courts and municipal authorities do what they can to impose basic rule of law. Across the towns, business partnerships weave extensive commercial ties, which transcend clan and conflict across

the countryside. This imbues Somali society with a dense network of communication and cooperative relations that are often critical in managing conflict and taking the edge off of what appears to be anarchy. The pastoral zones have never come under the effective control of a state, so the collapse of the state has not been as traumatic for nomadic populations as outsiders often presume. There, protection and access to resources in a political world which loosely approximates the ‘anarchy’ of the international system have long been secured through a combination of blood payment groups (*diya*), customary law (*xeer*), negotiation (*shir*), and the threat of force.

These extensive and intensive mechanisms for managing conflict and providing a very modest level of security in a context of state collapse are virtually invisible to external observers, whose sole preoccupation is usually with the one structure that historically provided the least amount of rule of law and the most amount of predation—the central state.

### **Protracted armed conflict**

Somalia remains a zone of intermittent armed conflict since 1988, but the intensity of armed clashes have changed since the destructive warfare of 1988–1992, when Somalia was in a genuine state of civil war. Since the UNOSOM intervention, Somalia’s armed clashes are generally localised, brief, and much less costly in terms of loss of life and damage to property.

The nature of armed conflicts has changed over time as well. In the early 1990s, armed conflicts were mainly inter-clan in nature, pitting large lineage groups against one another. These wars were characterised by sweeping and fast-moving campaigns across much of southern Somalia from the outskirts of Mogadishu to the Kenyan border. Massacres, rape, and other atrocities were routine. Pillaging and looting of captured territory were an essential aspect of the warfare, providing war booty to otherwise unpaid militiamen, and enriching merchants of war who served as financial backers of their clan’s warlord.

One of the most significant trends in armed conflict since 1992 has been the devolution of warfare to lower and lower levels of clan lineages. With few exceptions, most armed conflicts since 1995 have consisted of extended family feuds. The fragmentation of warfare in Somalia into much lower levels of lineage identity over time has many implications. It has meant that warfare has become much more localised; clashes



are contained within a sub-clan's territory or neighbourhoods. Conflicts are shorter in duration and less deadly, in part because of limited support from lineage members for such internal squabbles, in part because clan elders are in a better position to intervene, and in part, because money and ammunition is scarcer.<sup>20</sup> Conflicts are somewhat less predictable, often precipitated by a series of incidents involving theft or other misdemeanours. Although civilians remain the principal casualties in this fighting, targeted atrocities against civilians are now uncommon, as combatants are much more likely to be accountable in subsequent clan reconciliation processes. Pillaging and looting are no longer as common, in part because little territory is gained or lost in localised clashes, and in part because commodities worth stealing are generally in the hands of businessmen with paid security forces protecting them.

Parties to the armed clashes have changed as well. 'Warlords' have become less of a factor, as only a few have funds to pay a militia, and even those who do find it harder to manipulate 'clannism' in a context of increased inter-linkages between clans for commercial purposes. Since 1999, businessmen in Mogadishu who had previously provided funds to warlords in their clan have refused to pay, instead funding their own militias. These salaries are generally quite low—a dollar or two per day per militiaman. With few exceptions, gunmen fight for whoever will pay them, not for a clan or a cause, although in the event the clan is under attack, clan elders will mobilise gunmen for temporary purposes. The paucity of opportunities to loot, and the low salaries offered to militiamen, means that the status and earning power of a gunman is not what it used to be in Somalia, prompting a gradual, spontaneous demobilisation by militiamen, and reducing incentives for the new generation of young teens to take up arms as a form of employment. However, it has increased problems of lawlessness, especially kidnapping for ransom.

### **Lawlessness and criminality**

As with armed conflict, lawlessness in Somalia has changed considerably over the course of the 1990s. The early years of civil war, from 1988 to 1992, featured a level of impunity and gratuitous violence that has long since passed. Wholesale looting, rape, and murder associated with armed clashes rarely occur. In instances where such atrocities do take place, they provoke local and international condemnation.<sup>21</sup> Violent crimes and thefts are much more likely to be addressed via customary law and blood payments than before, serving both as a deterrent to would be criminals and reassurance to communi-

ties that criminals cannot commit crimes with complete impunity. Neighbourhoods and towns (often of mixed clan composition) in some places have organised the equivalent of 'neighbourhood watch' systems, sometimes absorbing former young gunmen into paid protection forces.

Lawless behaviour in contemporary Somalia remains a serious problem, especially in the more troubled south, where kidnapping for ransom has developed into a dangerous industry. Ironically, the most egregious crimes (if measured in value stolen or lives lost) are committed by many of the top political and business leaders whom the international community convenes for peace conferences. This includes incitement of deadly communal violence for narrow political purposes, embezzlement of foreign aid funds, introduction of counterfeit currency into circulation (which, by creating hyperinflation, robs average Somalis of most of their savings), huge land grabs by force of arms, export of charcoal (illegal under the past government and highly destructive environmentally), and involvement in piracy, among others. This criminal behaviour tends to get less attention than street crimes such as carjackings, murders, and kidnappings which are usually perpetrated by gangs or individuals and which are at epidemic proportions in some places, but which pale in comparison to the cost of the 'white collar crimes' committed by political and business leadership.

The key to these changes has been the gradual evolution in the political and economic interests of key actors inside Somalia, including many whose interests in the early 1990s were linked to a war economy and predation. The most important instance of shifting interests is the business community concentrated in Mogadishu. Most leading businessmen today were to some degree complicit in the war economy of the early 1990s, profiteering from the sale of arms, export of scrap metal, and diversion of food relief. Thanks to a confluence of factors, the nature of economic opportunity shifted in Somalia, leading many of these entrepreneurs to shift into legitimate (or at least quasi-legitimate) commerce and services. UNOSOM's massive economic presence produced lucrative opportunities in procurement, construction contracts, property rental, private security, and currency exchange, which drew war merchants and militiamen alike into livelihoods that are more respectable. The one million migrants and refugees who formed the Somali diaspora began sending money back to family members, fuelling demand that was met by the establishment of sophisticated, transnational remittance companies. The revolution in telecommunication technology in the mid-1990s provided an opening for the rise of Somali satellite phone companies. New economic opportuni-

ties for transit trade into Kenya helped to spark a booming import-export business involving thousands of small traders as well as major merchants, and sustained growth in the transportation sector. These and other economic opportunities required a degree of stability, security, and predictability, not warfare and criminality. Merchants who in 1992 oversaw the dismantling of the country's entire infrastructure for scrap metal and who profited from looted food relief now began sinking considerable sums of money into fixed assets—warehouses, telecommunication towers, plantations, hotels, and trucks. As they did, they became a constituency with vested interests in open roads, control over street crime, and peace. Thus, they have a greater interest in peace and paying customers, not armed clashes and famine victims. Some still indulge in questionable or illegal business activities, but these do not require, and they are not well served by armed conflict. War is now, for the most part, bad for business. The decision by leading Mogadishu businessmen in 1999 to refuse to pay taxes to warlords in their clans, to buy out the militiamen from beneath the warlords, and to support local *sharia* courts in a bid to clean up street crime, was a watershed moment in southern Somalia. It was the point at which the economic interests of the business elite helped to reshape the political landscape.

## *Demobilisation in Somalia*

The trend analysis presented above makes the case that Somalia's long-running crisis is clearly a dynamic situation, not merely a country caught in a vicious circle of perpetual conflict and underdevelopment. How does this more nuanced political assessment help shed light on the security-development nexus in Somalia? A brief survey of successful demobilisation in the country—an issue considered vital to almost all post-conflict settings, and a major preoccupation of the security-development nexus literature—is instructive.

Though hard figures on the number of Somali militiamen are elusive, there is universal consensus that far fewer young men are active members of militias or are in armed criminal gangs in 2004 than in the first half of the 1990s. The vast majority of gunmen have been effectively demobilised. Estimates that Mogadishu's population of one million includes some 60,000 gunmen are deceptive, since the vast majority of those armed men are employed as private security guards. Remarkably, this demobilisation has occurred in what most would consider the least conducive environment imaginable—in

a country where there is no central government, no reconciliation, extremely high levels of unemployment, and virtually no external aid programmes supporting demobilisation. Five sources of demobilisation are examined below.

### **The Somaliland demobilisation**

Though the demobilisation of militiamen in Somaliland is entirely unrelated to trends in the more conflict-ridden southern Somalia, it is part of an important success story in northern Somalia. When the Somali National Movement (SNM) drove the Somali national military out of Somaliland in 1990, northern Somalia faced worrisome circumstances—a political vacuum created by the collapsing Barre regime, the arrival of tens of thousands of young militiamen into the main city Hargeisa, and dangerous inter-clan tensions. Hargeisa and the rest of Somaliland could have plunged into the kind of looting, armed criminality, and clan violence that rocked southern Somalia, but did not, in large part due to a successful demobilisation programme there. The coalition of businessmen, politicians, and clan elders who brokered a peace at Boroma in 1991 agreed to the establishment of a secessionist Somaliland state. The Somaliland government that evolved from this accord was slow to develop much institutional capacity, but did succeed in demobilising the SNM and other militias in the region by absorbing them into the Somaliland national army. Indeed, in the late 1990s 70% of Somaliland's \$28 million budget was devoted to security and defence. Most of the defence budget was devoted to salaries for the army.<sup>22</sup> It would only be a mild exaggeration to claim that the Somaliland government in the 1990s was essentially one large demobilisation project, the allocation of most of the country's customs revenues to pay militiamen to remain encamped and under the control of political authorities. In ensuing years, the SNM fighters have married and grown older and are no longer a potential threat as uncontrolled gunmen; many have opted for civilian livelihoods. Meanwhile, the economy in Somaliland is strong enough to provide viable alternatives for young men, such that a career as a gunman is unattractive to young men there. The successful absorption of militiamen into the Somaliland army produced better levels of public order and security in northern Somalia than almost anywhere in the Horn of Africa. It was achieved without any external demobilisation or security sector reform assistance whatsoever.

## **UNOSOM demobilisation.**

During 1993–94, UNOSOM’s formal demobilisation projects—housed in its Demobilisation, Disarmament, and Demining (or ‘3D’) Department—was badly under-funded and had almost no impact in demobilising Somali militia. The demobilisation projects the department did undertake were often misused by militia leaders, who used the projects to house and feed gunmen who had no intention of demobilising. Inadvertently, however, UNOSOM became the source of a major spontaneous demobilisation in Mogadishu. For over two years, the enormous peacekeeping mission injected hundreds of millions of dollars into the local economy, via employment of thousands of Somalis, procurement and construction contracts, and property rental. This infusion of cash transformed the Mogadishu economy, serving as an unintentional but quite effective job creation scheme. Gunmen seeking an alternative livelihood found opportunities in sectors such as transportation and commerce, or more commonly as private security guards for businesses and private residences benefiting from the economic boom.

## **Spontaneous militia demobilisation**

After the departure of UNOSOM in 1995, most observers feared Somalia would revert to pre-intervention levels of predation and armed conflict, but conditions had changed in ways that made a livelihood of plunder both more dangerous and less remunerative. Easily lootable assets were scarcer by then. Businessmen had secured robust private security forces to protect their wealth, and they were able to tap into their clans to deter or punish bandits. Traditional elders had also begun to reassert customary clan law, which held criminals and their blood payments groups accountable for theft and assaults. While predatory behaviour was still an option against weak social groups (the internally displaced, minorities, and low caste lineages) bandits were confronted with the fact that many of these groups had armed themselves and were more dangerous targets than in the past.

Even in the ‘golden years’ of pillage, 1991–92, the life of a gunman was extremely dangerous. Since the mid-1990s, a process of natural selection has tended to diminish the number of young gunmen eager to engage in armed conflict and armed banditry. Many of those who were risk-takers were injured or killed, while the majority of militiamen have exhibited a notable preference for more risk-averse, predictable sources of livelihoods. In some cases, gunmen have simply married into local communities and

taken up new occupations. More often, militia gangs have morphed into protection rackets, finding it both safer and more sustainable to exact a portion of villagers' harvests for protection instead of looting them of all their harvests. In the parlance of biology, these gunmen have shifted from being poorly adapted to well-adapted parasites, by learning not to kill their hosts. In some cases, these arrangements constitute a grey area between extortion and taxation, between protection racket and nascent security force. Survival instincts are not the only driver of this behaviour. Over the course of the 1990s, the status of young gunmen in local communities went from prestigious to disdainful. In much of Somalia, it has become 'bad form' for men to walk openly with weapons on the streets.

### **Business-led demobilisation, 1999 onwards**

Today, some of the largest militias in Mogadishu are controlled by wealthy businessmen who use them as security forces to protect their investments. The recent opening of a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Mogadishu, for instance, involved the hiring of 125 employees and several hundred security guards, a force few militia leaders can sustain.<sup>23</sup> The increasingly powerful business community in Mogadishu not only contributes to demobilisation by hiring gunmen as private security guards, but also has engaged in an intentional strategy to buy the militiamen away from warlords, placing them under the control of *sharia* courts, where they become a force for law enforcement rather than law-breaking.

### **Al-Islah and education-driven demobilisation**

The prolonged collapse of the Somalia education system meant that for years gunmen who sought a way out of a life of war fighting and crime had few means of retooling for a legitimate trade. 'My gun is my job' was a common response to foreign journalists querying gunmen about their chosen occupation. Since the late 1990s, however, an Islamic charity group, al-Islah, has helped to finance the opening of dozens of primary and secondary schools in the Mogadishu area. As of 2004, 100,000 young people are in school. While it is too early to predict the long-term impact of this major educational initiative, it is very likely to redirect hundreds if not thousands of young men away from work in militias or criminal gangs by providing an alternative source of training and values.

## *Conclusion*

The Somalia case reinforces several seemingly obvious and yet often overlooked claims about complex political emergencies. First, in zones of war, criminal violence, and state collapse, the individuals and communities caught in these crises actively seek to reduce and manage risk, and are quick to fashion informal systems providing a modicum of security and predictability in their lives. Too often, external interventions into conflict and post-conflict settings make the false presumption that communities beset by predatory banditry or war are passive victims, when in reality they are expert at the art of survival and adaptation. At a societal level, this translates into a tendency for 'systems'—uncodified but often complex arrangements governing predictable movement, transactions, and expectations—to emerge even in the most seemingly chaotic environments. That those systems are all but invisible to most external actors does not make them any less real.

Second, even the local actors who profiteer from the collapse of rule of law tend to gravitate toward risk management and 'rule-bound' behaviour, which places great value on predictability. This is partially a survival impulse in a terrifying environment, but is also due to the fact that the interests of predators in these crises change over time, especially among those who, after having accrued considerable fortunes in war economies, come belatedly to appreciate the many virtues of law and order.<sup>24</sup>

Third, the Somali case underscores the fact that these changing interests on the part of a wide cast of characters in collapsed states and war zones can drive broader changes in the nature and scope of the conflict itself. Crises that at first glance appear to be a manifestation of a 'conflict trap' may in fact be in a state of evolution, with the potential to produce new social orders out of chaos. These social orders are almost invariably violent, exploitative, and illiberal, and they may not be at all interested in culminating in a revived central government. However, they are orders, not anarchy, and their evolution may in some instances constitute the best chance a country or community has to emerge from the ruin of war into something worthy of the expression 'post-conflict.'

Documenting the nascent local and regional political systems arising out of the Somalia crisis is in no way intended to obscure the reality that zones of state collapse like Somalia remain extremely dangerous, insecure places. For international aid agencies engaged in post-conflict assistance, it does raise several issues. First, it serves as a

reminder that external actors should at a minimum work to ensure that their aid interventions work with, not against, prevailing political trends toward political organisation and consolidation in post-conflict settings. In more than one case, aid agencies working in Somalia have inadvertently undermined promising local initiatives out of a strict adherence to an agency template and a lack of knowledge about local politics. The corollary to this claim is that external actors must be equipped with a strong understanding of local conflict dynamics and an accurate inventory of local political interests. Second, external actors must be sensitive to the fact that promising community-based developments in matters such as demobilisation can actually be sabotaged if outside funders inject themselves at inopportune moments.<sup>25</sup> One of the most surprising aspects of successful demobilisation in Somalia is the virtual absence of external actors. These were locally owned and locally driven processes of demobilisation which almost certainly would have collapsed had external funding been offered. That they occurred in the absence of a functional central government and national reconciliation is an additional challenge to conventional thinking about the security-development nexus.

## Endnotes

- 1 The vicious circle metaphor is usually dressed up in more impressive academic prose; one study refers to 'pathological interaction dynamics' to make the same point. See Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, 'The Nature of the Intractable Conflict Problem' [<http://www.beyondintractability.org/iweb/challenge-3-es-say.htm>] (accessed 21 May 2004).
- 2 Paul Collier *et al.*, *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy* (Washington DC: The World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 1.
- 3 The World Bank study cited above notes that civil wars today are on average twice as long in duration than in the past, and attributes this to a war economy dynamic. See Collier, *et al.*, *Breaking the Conflict Trap*, p. 82.
- 4 The concept of the 'hurting stalemate' as precondition for negotiated settlement of civil wars was developed by I. William Zartman in *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 5 See for instance Mats Berdal and David Malone, eds, *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Press, 2000); and David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars* Adelphi Paper no. 320 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 1998)
- 6 Collier *et al.*, *Breaking the Conflict Trap*, p. 79.
- 7 Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: the Merging of Security and Development* (London: Zed Books, 2001).
- 8 Peter Uvin, 'The Development/Peacebuilding Nexus: A Typology and History of Changing Paradigms', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* Vol. 1, no. 1 (2002), p. 12.
- 9 Collier *et al.*, *Breaking the Conflict Trap*, p. 174.
- 10 John J. Hamre and Gordon R. Sullivan, 'Toward Post-conflict Reconstruction', *Washington Quarterly* 25(4), 2002, 85–96.
- 11 As the situation in Iraq soured in early 2004, however, pessimistic voices challenging the new consensus on nation-building have quickly resurfaced, suggesting the possibility that, in American circles in particular, the pendulum may again swing back to a more fatalistic view on prospects for post-conflict reconstruction, just as occurred in the aftermath of the ill-fated intervention in Somalia in 1994. See for instance George Will, 'Time for Bush to See the Realities of Iraq', *Washington Post* (4 May 2004), p. A25; and John Tierney, 'The Hawks Loudly Express Their Second Thoughts', *The New York Times, Week in Review* (16 May 2004).
- 12 This apt term was first coined by Mark Dillon in a 1997 presentation, and has since been used by analysts such as Mark Duffield in *Global Governance*.



- 13 The line of reasoning which understands the 'new wars' as dynamic crises producing new social orders has been explored by a number of researchers, including Duffield, *Global Governance*; Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991); and William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).
- 14 This section of the article is derived from chapter 1 of the author's publication *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*, Adelphi Paper no. 364 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 2004).
- 15 TNG President Abdiqassim Hassan Salad declared an extension to the TNG's mandate, and so continues to represent Somalia in international fora, but the TNG is for all practical purposes merely another faction today.
- 16 International Crisis Group, 'Somalia: Combating Terrorism in a Failed State', ICG Africa Report No. 45, (Brussels/Washington: ICG, May 2002) [<http://www.crisisweb.org>].
- 17 Ken Menkhous and John Prendergast, 'Governance and Economic Survival in Post-Intervention Somalia', *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 172, May 1995.
- 18 The author conducted research on local governance for the UN Development Office for Somalia in 1998 in five regions of southern Somalia – a summary report of trends in Somali local governance based on that research is available in Menkhous, 'Political and Security Assessment of Southern Somalia: Implications for Emergency Response' (Nairobi: UNDOCS report, 11 December 1998).
- 19 Robert Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy', *The Atlantic Monthly* 273(2), 1994, 44–76.
- 20 One close observer to the fighting in Mogadishu reports that the average cost of a full-scale armed clash lasting six hours costs about \$100,000 in ammunition, a steep price that few warlords are capable of sustaining; hence, it is unusual for armed clashes to last more than a few hours.
- 21 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Somalia Humanitarian Situation Report*, Nairobi (30 July 2003), pp. 5–6.
- 22 By 2004, security and defence expenditures constituted only about 50% of the total budget.
- 23 'Coke and al Qaeda', *The Economist* (3–9 April 2004), p. 50, and William Maclean, 'Defying Mayhem, Somali Plans Coca-Cola Venture', *Reuters* (20 February 2004).
- 24 The seminal historical research advancing this observation is Charles Tilly's 'War Making and State Making as Organized Crime', in *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 25 This mirrors the findings of a major study on demobilisation, Mats Berdal, *Disarmament and Demobilisation after Civil Wars* Adelphi Paper No. 303 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the IISS, 1996), pp. 74–76.

