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Somalia and the Dependency Syndrome



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Somalia and the Dependency Syndrome

President Barack Obama signed on Tuesday April 13, 2010 an Executive Order that freezes the assets of the members of Somali radical groups contributing the chaos that currently engulfs Somalia. This applaudable action was long overdue, and it could be the beginning of a long-awaited solution to the world's only failed state.

Like many African countries, Somalia has been on the international community's bailout list even before it was granted independence in 1960. It was spoon-fed by one country or another; by the U.N., the World Bank, and other international organizations. The harsh reality is that Somalia has never taken care of its own affairs or conducted business on its own.

Birth of Dependency

In 1941 Somalia, a British colony in the north and an Italian colony in the south was placed under British Military Administration (BMA), supervised by the WWII allies, known as the Four Powers: the U.K., the U.S., France and the former U.S.S.R. They all supported Somalia's unification and independence. In 1948 the Four Powers created a commission to investigate Somalia's preparedness for independence and self-governance. They soon realized that Somalia was not ready to self-governance, finding that a vast majority of Somalis were asking for at least 10 years of guardianship and assistance. When asked what country they wanted as their trustee for this process, most Somalis answered: "We need all four!" Their justification and logic was based on the old saying: *qof ay affar halaad u irmantahay iyo qof ay mid qura u irmantahay ma isku midba?* which means "Is the person milking four she-camels equal to someone milking just one?"



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So in 1949 the U.N. placed Somalia under a Trusteeship Administration with Italy as the trustee. This transitional period lasted from 1950-1960. The dependence syndrome was already well engrained with Somali attitudes towards self reliance being *Wihii talyaani laga waayo Qarumaha Midobey baa laga heli* or "Our needs will be provided by either by the U.N. or Italy."

All public works, schools, hospitals, the military and police forces and even the main hotels in the capital of Mogadishu, the Juba and Shabelle, were built by the U.N. through Italy. Likewise, every sector of

society was managed by the U.N. via Italy: livestock, agricultural development, water, and marine resources.

In July 1960 the independent Somali Republic began. But did the country ever operate for a single day as an independent nation? From day one the annual budget was covered by Italy, with constant programs of “technical assistance” and handouts from various U.N. agencies, the European Economic Community EEC, the World Bank, and soon others came courting like the League of Arab States (LAS), the Organization of the Islamic Conference OIC and countries from the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement).

Foreign aid poured in from all sides, but in vain. In those days Somalia was coined as “the graveyard of foreign aid.” The newly independent government essentially ceded power from the very beginning. On claims that the government was corrupt and organized around traditional Somali clan rivalries, in 1969 General Siad Barre and his military junta took power. His administration quickly became a pawn of the Cold War’s superpower rivalry with both the former Soviet Union and the U.S. cozying up. Both sides supplied Barre with military aid and economic assistance. He used this to wage proxy wars against Somalia’s neighbors. He created clan militias which prospered in the 1980s, under a “divide and conquer” strategy pitting the clans against each other while President Barre strengthened his own base. All this “fiddling while Rome burned” with Somalia’s people slowly starving to death, was carried out under the watchful eye of “the usual suspects” of foreign aid.

As the Cold War waned, and military firepower diminished, President Barre was unable to tie down the clan whirlwind any longer, and the Somali state, such as it was, collapsed as he departed in 1991. Since then Somalia’s social fabric has totally disintegrated.

Dependency Remodeled

A patchwork of anarchic entities evolved. Several transitional authorities (U.N. Operations I and II) succeeded one another, all blessed by the international community. Both theoretically provided the resources needed to bring Somalia to its feet. Both totally failed. The U.S. Operation Restore Hope also turned disastrous after the notorious “Blackhawk Down” incident in 1993.

By 1995 all multinational troops had withdrawn from Somalia. But the foreign aid continued pouring into the country. The transitional authorities, theoretically running the country, were totally dependent on this foreign aid to survive. Even the salaries of the country’s legislators, in the Transitional Federal Parliament, are until today paid by international aid organizations.

None of the military or civilian aid programs have brought stability to Somalia. They have also created no jobs. Unemployment in Somalia is not the much decried 10 - 20% of the U.S. and Western Europe, but more like 90% of the populace. And any Somali who could possibly flee the constant violence and fear

has fled, meaning that there is nary a country in the world that does not house at least a few Somali refugees or illegal aliens. But this diaspora, in turn, has turned into the main source of income for their relatives: the least, the last and the lost of Somalia, who were too old or too young or too weak to escape.

Thus began the *hawala* remittance system, where Somalis around the globe labor in whatever job they can find, usually for low wages, and often skipping meals, so that they can wire some sustenance back home to elderly parents or other relatives, who live on these handouts.

So the syndrome of dependence evolves, but is always basically the same. Except that the *hawala* system has created fat cat middlemen in the diaspora and inside Somalia. Their interests are served well by keeping the remittance system going, so the fat cats are funding the Somali militias to keep the country without a stable government that could eventually establish a banking system.

Bold Change

In the light of the above, President Obama’s Executive Order designed to freeze the U.S.-based financial assets of those supporting and financing the Islamic militant groups and pirate gangs is a step in the right direction. But it must be fully implemented. Otherwise, Somalia will continue to be the newest jihad factory, now that al-Qaeda is forced to leave Afghanistan and Pakistan.



Mohamed Dahir, AFP/Getty Images



Roberto Schmidt — Getty Image

Since 1991, Somalia has not been a state so much as a lawless, ungoverned space on the map between its neighbors and the seas. To even call it a “failed state” is probably generous. It is hard to think of the poor malnourished children and feeble elderly men and women of Somalia some of whom might be affected by the Executive Order, if it is enforced. But without these first steps of tough love, the al-Qaeda modeled radicals of al-Shabab will continue to have free reign. And the world’s security will increasingly be threatened. Somalia has some natural resources and plenty of smart people. Given half a chance the country can rise again. But Somalia does not need more tranquilizers, and this tough love is the right start.