

## SOMALIA

### WHERE CLAN FAMILIES RULE

This paper concentrates on those aspects of modern Somalia of interest to the toponymist: modern history, people, language, writing systems and geographical names. It is not otherwise a specialist text. The paper is drawn together from an assortment of material, from a wide variety of sources, all contained in the PCGN *Somalia* country file, with particular acknowledgement of the assistance afforded by material from Mr Michael H Madany. Geographical names are spelt in accordance with Somali orthography, except that the English conventional name *Mogadishu* is used in running text. Personal names are also spelt in accordance with Somali orthography; to overcome their possible unfamiliarity in this guise the following list shows correspondences to more familiar forms:

Farax Caydiid	Farah Aydid
Xuseen Caydiid	Husayn Aydid
Siyaad Barre	Siad Barre
Ibraahiim Cigaal	Ibrahim Egal
Cabdullahi Yuusuf Axmed	Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed
Cusmaan Yuusuf Keenodiid	Osman Yusuf Kenadid
Cabdulqasim Salaad Xasan	Abdulkassim Salat Hasan

**SECTION A: Brief Introductory Background**

**SECTION B: Ethnic Composition**

**SECTION C: Languages & Writing Systems**

**SECTION D: Administrative Divisions & Population**

**SECTION E: Somalia in 2001**

## **SECTION A: Brief Introductory Background**

- 1 In 1960, the separate colonial territories of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland became independent in quick succession, and they united in the July of that year to form Somalia. The design chosen for the national flag of this newly independent country was suggestive of a pan-Somalism which immediately aroused suspicion among the country's neighbours. The five points on the star central to the flag relate to the five areas where ethnic Somalis are to be found: not only the former Italian Somaliland and the former British Somaliland, but also the neighbouring areas of Djibouti, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, and north-eastern Kenya.
  
- 2 A civilian government ruled the country until 1969, when it was overthrown by the army, which set up a Supreme Revolutionary Council and installed Siyaad Barre as president. He introduced a Marxist style regime and became a client of the Soviet Union, until his decision to invade the Ogaden region of Ethiopia in 1977 caused the Soviets to abandon Somalia and switch their support to the Marxist government which had seized power in Ethiopia in 1974. Somali troops were repulsed from Ethiopia in 1978. Siyaad Barre's autocratic rule lasted for over two decades, until January 1991, whereupon internal unrest forced him to flee the country<sup>1</sup>. In the decade since that date, Somalia has effectively been without a central government, and has instead been at the mercy of numerous regional clan-based and factional guerrilla groups, the most notorious of these being led by Farax Caydiid and subsequently (since 1996) his son Xuseen Caydiid. Several attempts to bring this anarchy to an end have all failed, though the most recent<sup>2</sup> has at least seen the establishment of a Transitional National Government and the election of a national president. However, the reasons for the sentiments behind the plaintive title of a website article "*Will there ever be Somalia?*" are all too understandable; Somalia is to all intents and purposes a vacuum.
  
- 3 This power vacuum, arising during the 1990s, saw the creation within the territory of Somalia of two self-proclaimed "states", neither of which enjoys international recognition. The first of these, "Somaliland", was created as early as May 1991 under the leadership of Ibraahiim Cigaal. This entity is run from the town of Hargeysa, and claims the entire area of the former British Somaliland<sup>3</sup>. The second entity, known as "Puntland"<sup>4</sup>, came into being in the spring of 1998 under the leadership of Cabdullahi Yuusuf Axmed. Puntland is administered from the town of Garoowe<sup>5</sup>, and comprises the administrative districts of Bari, Nugaal, and northern Mudug. The districts of Sool, eastern Sanaag and south-eastern Togdheer are contested (politically and sometimes militarily) between Somaliland and Puntland, with the town of Laascaanood in particular seeing frequent changes of administration.

---

<sup>1</sup> See footnote 23.

<sup>2</sup> A conference held in 'Arta, Djibouti, in mid-2000; see Section E.

<sup>3</sup> The present-day administrative divisions of Awdal, Woqooyi Galbeed, Togdheer, Sanaag & Sool (but see also later in this paragraph). See Section D for full information on administrative divisions.

<sup>4</sup> "Punt" was the Ancient Egyptian name for the coastline of northern Somalia.

<sup>5</sup> Though recent unrest has forced Cabdullahi Yuusuf Axmed to re-locate to the south in Gaalkacyo, while a leadership rival attempts to take over Puntland affairs in Garoowe & Boosaaso.

- 4 It is worth noting a fundamental distinction between these two unrecognised entities. Somaliland has repeatedly asserted its “independence” and stated that it will never rejoin Somalia. Puntland, by contrast, explicitly states in its “charter” that it does not seek independence or secession; it wishes the whole of Somalia to be administered in the same manner as it is itself, with a government chosen by all the people. The contrast is evident in the titles each accords itself: “Republic of Somaliland” but “Puntland State of Somalia”.

## **SECTION B:            Ethnic Composition**

- 5 Somalia is very largely homogeneous in its ethnic composition. About 85% of the population are ethnically Somali (the remainder being Bantu and Arab). Yet the subject of ethnic composition cannot simply be left there, because perhaps the most significant factor in Somali society is the division of the Somali people into six major Clan Families. In the modern orthography, these Clan Families are named as follows:

<b>Dir</b>	
<b>Isxaaq</b>	formerly spelt <i>Ishaak</i> or <i>Is'hak</i>
<b>Daarood</b>	formerly spelt <i>Darod</i>
<b>Hawiye</b>	formerly spelt <i>Hawiya</i>
<b>Digil</b>	
<b>Rahanwiin</b>	formerly spelt <i>Rahanwein</i>

The approximate distribution of these Clan Families can be seen in the map on page 4. It is important to note that this distribution extends into all three of Somalia’s neighbouring countries: Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. The nomadic lifestyle of most Somalis means that there is considerable human movement across the political boundaries; this periodically creates friction between the four states involved. In particular, the Haud region of north-eastern Ethiopia (centred approximately at 0800N 4500E) is an area of good winter grazing which attracts seasonal nomadic movement from Somalia. The Haud, like the Ogaden to the south (also in Ethiopia and centred approximately at 0700N 4600E), thereby becoming the cause of tension or even warfare between the two countries<sup>6</sup>.

- 6 The relationship between the Clan Families and the various languages and dialects of Somalia<sup>7</sup> is extraordinarily complex. Put very simply, the Dir and Isxaaq Clan Families speak northern/standard Somali, as do elements of the Daarood and Hawiye Clan Families. But other elements of these latter two Clan Families speak Somali dialects, as does the Digil Clan Family. The Rahanwiin Clan Family is usually associated with the Maay language<sup>8</sup>. The Clan Families are sub-divided into clans, which are in turn made up of sub-clans. Examples of significant clans include the *Ciise*<sup>9</sup> of the Dir Clan Family, and the *Ogaadeen* and *Majeerteen* of the Daarood Clan Family.

---

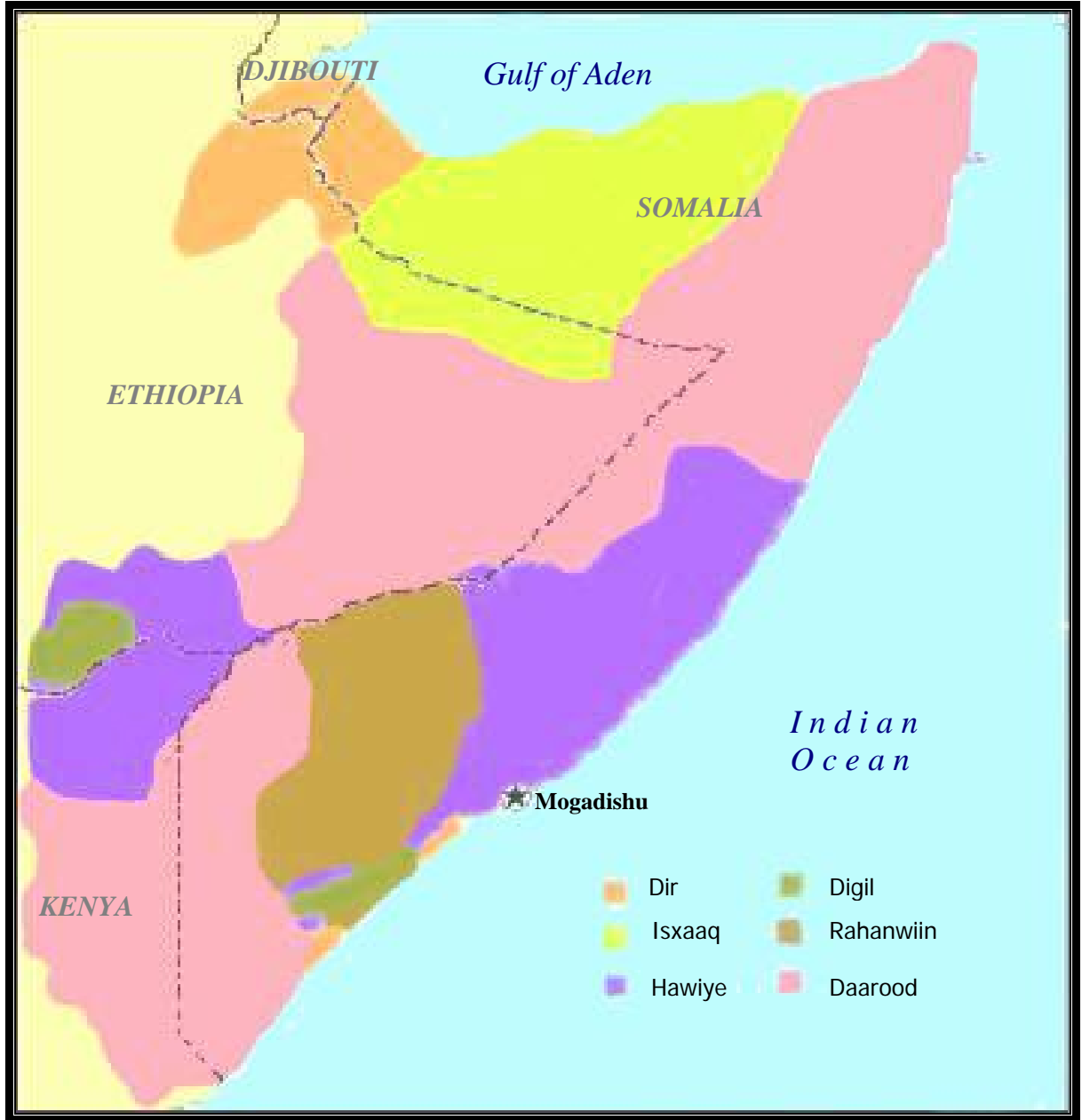
<sup>6</sup> See paragraph 2.

<sup>7</sup> See paragraphs 7 & 11.

<sup>8</sup> See paragraph 11.

<sup>9</sup> In the former spelling *Issa*, this clan formed part of the name of the *French Territory of the Afars and the Issas*, (1967-77), now the independent state of Djibouti.

Generalised map of the ethnic composition of Somalia



## **SECTION C: Languages & Writing Systems**

- 7 The national and official language of Somalia is Somali, which belongs to the Cushitic group of languages. It is enriched by the presence of additional vocabulary (about 20% of the total) imported from the Arabic language. For many years, the Somali language had no written form. During the colonial era, while the country was divided between Italian and British rule, geographical names were spelt in accordance with Italian spelling conventions within Italian Somaliland, and in accordance with English spelling conventions within British Somaliland. Thus the same Somali word for a “pool” or “spring” appeared as *Iscia* in the former area and as *Isha* in the latter.
- 8 In the 1920s, a serious attempt was made by a Somali scholar named Cusmaan Yuusuf Keenodiid to introduce a standard script for the Somali language; this script was named *Osmania* and it rather resembled the script used by the Georgian language. It was, however, banned by the Italian authorities who considered it to be a threatening manifestation of Somali nationalism.
- 9 Yet although Somalia achieved independence in 1960, it was not until 1972 that agreement was reached on the script which the national language would use. During the 1960s, the geographical names of Somalia were most frequently encountered in a modified Roman script form devised in Italy. This used diacritical marks and special letters to represent the particular characteristics of the language. Not until 1971 did the Somali government establish a Somali Language Commission, to consider the medium by which Somali should be written. *Osmania* was discarded as being too unfamiliar a script in a world-wide context; Arabic was rejected as unsuitable because of its inability properly to display the five vowels present in Somali<sup>10</sup>. Also rejected, as being too cumbersome, was the modified Roman script of the 1960s.
- 10 But the merits of Roman script in general had for long been noted by scholars such as Andrzejewski<sup>11</sup>, and in October 1972 a decision was made by the Somali Language Commission to use this script as the mechanism for the writing of the Somali language. It was adopted by the government organs of administration in January 1973. Long vowels were to be registered by a simple doubling of the letter (eg *aa*, *oo*), and the otherwise redundant Roman letter *c* and *x* would be used to represent the characteristic Somali ‘*ayn* and strong *h* respectively (both sounds also present in Arabic). A simple apostrophe would denote the glottal stop.

---

<sup>10</sup> Though there were strong emotional arguments in favour of Arabic, perceived by many as being the natural script of the Islam religion followed in Somalia (most Somalis belong to the *Sunni* branch of Islam).

<sup>11</sup> Professor at the School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London; probably the pre-eminent foreign scholar of Somali of his generation.

- 11 Although the government claimed that standard Somali (based on northern Somali but also intelligible in and around the capital, Mogadishu) was the only indigenous language of Somalia<sup>12</sup>, there are in fact Somali dialects and indeed other Cushitic languages also spoken within the country. These dialects and languages are found principally in the area between the two major southern rivers (Shabeelle and Jubba), the other Cushitic languages being Maay (with perhaps 1 million speakers), plus Garre, Tunni, Jiiddu and Dabarre, each with about 50,000 speakers.
- 12 The alphabet chosen was exemplary in its simplicity and efficiency; the problem in the early years was in finding source materials which employed it. For the next decade, the only available publication using the new orthography appeared to be the official newspaper *Xiddigta Oktoobar* (= *October Star*), launched in 1973, and PCGN scanned this source regularly in the search for official written forms of geographical names in their new orthography.
- 13 Unbeknown to PCGN at the time, however, the Soviet “technical advisors” present in Somalia during the early and middle 1970s had gradually produced complete cartographic coverage of the country at the scales of 1:100,000 and 1:200,000, both utilising the new orthography. Once these maps had become freely available outside Somalia (by 1982), they radically transformed the situation by providing instantly a complete toponymic *tableau* of the country<sup>13</sup>. For the first time, Somalia not only possessed an established official orthography, but furthermore its basic mapping series displayed the authoritative spellings of its geographical names in that official orthography<sup>14</sup>. And, given that the new orthography was in Roman script, no BGN/PCGN romanization system was required.
- 14 The evolution of the spelling of Somali toponyms can be seen in the table of examples below. The first column represents spellings as used by the two colonial authorities in their respective areas of administration. The spellings in the second column were never official in the strict sense, but for a period in the 1960s and early 1970s they did represent the best extent of PCGN’s knowledge of Somali toponymy as it stood at that time. The third column represents modern official spellings as found on the current official map sources. Note that the letters “c” and “x” do not conform to any of the values either possesses in the English language; the former is better regarded as a “catch in the throat”, while the latter is a strong “h”.

---

<sup>12</sup> Apart from an acknowledgement of the two Bantu languages (Swahili and Mushungulu) spoken by perhaps 100,000 people in small pockets along the southern coastal plain towards Kenya.

<sup>13</sup> Though certain technical problems of toponymic interpretation remained.

<sup>14</sup> Occasionally, the name provided to the Soviets by Somali toponymic field collectors may have been technically deficient, if the field collector originated from a different part of the country and was not fully acquainted with the particular dialect of the area of field collection. A classic example is Baydhabo (0307N 4339E), known locally in the Maay language as Baydhowa (hence the spelling *Baidoa* used in the former Italian Somaliland). Nevertheless, as a general rule it makes sense to regard the name/spelling on the official map series as being the standardised form.

**Examples of the evolution of the spelling of geographical names**

<b>COLONIAL SPELLING (Italian/English style)</b>	<b>EARLY POST-INDEPENDENCE SPELLING</b>	<b>CURRENT SOMALI SPELLING</b>	<b>COORDINATES</b>
Alula	‘Alūla	Caluula	1158N 5045E
Bender Cassim [name change»]	Bōsāso	Boosaaso	1117N 4910E
Burao	Bur‘o	Burco	0931N 4532E
Dante [name change»]	Ḥāfūn	Xaafuun	1025N 5116E
Diglei	Ḍiglēy	Dhigleey	0414N 4255E
Erigavo	‘Ērigābo	Ceerigaabo	1037N 4722E
Galcaio	Gālka‘yo	Gaalkacyo	0647N 4726E
Heis	Ḥīs	Xiis	1053N 4655E
Mayd	Mayḍ	Maydh	1100N 4707E
Oddur	Ḥuddur	Xuddur	0407N 4354E

**SECTION D: Administrative Divisions & Population**

15 The population of Somalia is variously estimated at 7.5 million, 9.5 million, and even 12.5 million<sup>15</sup>. The country is officially divided into 18 first-order administrative divisions<sup>16</sup>, each known as a *gobolka*. They can be seen in the map overleaf. The straight-line boundaries of many of the divisions bear testament to the somewhat arbitrary nature of the first-order division arrangement in a country where a nomadic lifestyle pertains. There are only five towns in Somalia with a population of more than 100,000:

<b>Muqdisho</b> <sup>17</sup>	1,211,300	0204N 4522E
<b>Berbera</b>	242,900	1026N 4501E
<b>Hargeysa</b>	197,100	0935N 4404E
<b>Kismaayo</b>	195,900	0022S 4232E
<b>Marka</b>	168,200	0143N 4453E

**BOUNDARIES OF SOMALIA**

Djibouti	35 miles
Ethiopia	1015 miles
Kenya	425 miles

**TOTAL BOUNDARY: 1475 miles**

<sup>15</sup> In an area of 246,200 square miles; slightly smaller than Texas and slightly larger than Ukraine

<sup>16</sup> There are also two unofficial entities within Somalia; see paragraphs 3 & 4.

<sup>17</sup> The capital of Somalia; conventionally **Mogadishu**.

FIRST-ORDER DIVISION	ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE	COORDS OF ADMIN CENTRE	POPULATION OF ADMIN CENTRE
01 Awdal	Baki <sup>18</sup>	0959N 4320E	6,400
02 Bakool	Xuddur	0407N 4354E	not known
03 Banaadir	Muqdisho <sup>19</sup>	0204N 4522E	1,211,300
04 Bari	Boosaaso	1117N 4911E	31,800
05 Bay <sup>20</sup>	Baydhabo <sup>21</sup>	0307N 4339E	78,100
06 Galguduud	Dhuusa Marreeb	0531N 4624E	11,000
07 Gedo	Garbahaarrey	0319N 4213E	17,000
08 Hiiraan	Beledweyne	0445N 4512E	61,500
09 Jubbada Dhexe	Bu'aale	0105N 4235E	not known
10 Jubbada Hoose	Kismaayo	0022S 4232E	195,900
11 Mudug	Gaalkacyo	0647N 4726E	41,700
12 Nugaal	Garoowe	0824N 4830E	18,000
13 Sanaag	Ceerigaabo	1037N 4722E	18,200
14 Shabeellaha Dhexe	Jawhar	0246N 4531E	73,400
15 Shabeellaha Hoose	Marka	0143N 4453E	168,200
16 Sool	Laascaanood	0828N 4721E	10,500
17 Togdheer	Burco	0931N 4532E	53,500
18 Woqooyi Galbeed	Hargeysa	0935N 4404E	197,100

## NOTES

**General Note on Language:** In Somali, the definite article is placed at the end of a noun, running solid along from it. The masculine article is *ka*; the feminine is *ta*. Depending on the final letter of the noun proper, these articles may mutate into (eg) *ga* or *ha* if masculine, and into (eg) *da* if feminine. Certain geographical names will experience this phenomenon; note, for example, the articles present in the words **Jubbada** (09 & 10 above) and **Shabeellaha** (14 & 15 above)

01 **Awdal** was the name of a mediaeval Muslim kingdom located in this area

01 & 16 **Awdal** & **Sool** were created in June 1984 in the non-Isxaaq areas of former British Somaliland, as a “reward” for the inhabitants’ particular loyalty to the then president, Siyaad Barre. The Isxaaq had in 1981 created an opposition Somali National Movement and in 1987 Siyaad Barre’s troops responded violently by razing much of the Isxaaq capital, Hargeysa

03 The geographical region known as *Banaadir* or *Benadir* extends more widely, approximating to the divisions 03, 14 & 15

04 **Bari** = “east”

04 & 12 **Bari** & **Nugaal** approximate to the geographical region known as *Migiurtinia* or *Mijirtein*

09 & 14 **Dhexe** = “middle”

10 & 15 **Hoose** = “lower”

18 **Woqooyi Galbeed** = “north-west”

<sup>18</sup> Although the administrative centre, Baki is an obscure locality rather than a populated place, and is not familiar to most Somalis. The main town of this division is Boorama (0956N 4311E).

<sup>19</sup> Muqdisho, (conventionally Mogadishu, the capital city) is frequently given the name **Xamar** by Somalis, though strictly **Xamar** relates only to portions of the city and to one of its constituent clans.

<sup>20</sup> The correct spelling may be **Baay**.

<sup>21</sup> See footnote 14.

## **SECTION E: Somalia in 2001**

- 16 Somalia is a desperately impoverished country. It is even claimed that its principal asset is not a conventional asset at all, but has in fact been the sale of the country's strategic location to foreign powers, as occurred *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union during the early Siyaad Barre years<sup>22</sup>. The strategic port of Berbera has always been prized, just as its counterpart Aden has been. Somalia is frequently cited as a "failed state"; indeed, it is perhaps one of the classic examples of that genre. Although substantially homogeneous in ethnic terms, the Clan Family structure appears impossible to break down in favour of some encompassing national identity. A Somali does not ask another *where* he is from, but *whom* he is from. Neither the colonial period nor the Marxist "scientific socialism" experiment of the 1970s and 1980s<sup>23</sup> could overcome this basic fact, as the anarchy of the last decade has once again illustrated<sup>24</sup>.
- 17 A conversion of the 18 regions into a federal structure, accepting the reality of the Clan Families, may represent the only hope of bringing Somalia together as a discrete and coherent nation. Such an objective formed part of the agreement reached at the Somalia National Peace Conference held in 'Arta, Djibouti, in the summer of 2000, at which various Somali political and clan factions were represented. This conference had the encouragement of pan-African organisations (such as the Organisation of African Unity) and the United Nations<sup>25</sup>; organisations at which Somalia's seat currently lies vacant. Most of Somalia's civil society favours the reconciliation promised by the 'Arta conference, though many factional warlords are opposed, and some have set up an opposition Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC).
- 18 By October 2000, as a result of the 'Arta conference, Somalia had an elected national president (Abdulqasim Salat Hasan<sup>26</sup>) for the first time in a decade, and also a Transitional National Government (TNG) mandated to devise a constitution and create a permanent national government by 2003. Efforts will be made to reach out to the "rogue" entities of the north; it is accepted that this task may be easier in relation to Puntland than it is with Somaliland<sup>27</sup>. The 'Arta conference also proposed that Baydhabo should serve as the provisional capital of the interim Somali government until such time as the current unrest in Mogadishu ends. But recent demographic changes have seen Mogadishu increasingly dominated by one particular Clan Family (the Hawiye), and this development makes that city less acceptable to others as the national capital.

---

<sup>22</sup> In 1977 the Soviets switched their support from Somalia to that country's larger neighbour, Ethiopia; see paragraph 2.

<sup>23</sup> Which specifically included a call by Siyaad Barre to consign the clans to history and create a new unified socialist nation. Yet even his power was clan-based and he was ultimately overthrown when he (of the Daarood Clan Family) militarily attacked the Hawiye Clan Family in Mogadishu and was repulsed.

<sup>24</sup> See paragraph 2.

<sup>25</sup> This conference was the thirteenth attempt to introduce a successful peace process since Siyaad Barre's downfall in 1991. It is notable that neither "Somaliland" nor "Puntland" attended.

<sup>26</sup> The president is of the Hawiye Clan Family, and served in the Siyaad Barre administration.

<sup>27</sup> See paragraph 4.

# SOMALIA

