

## **International Interventions and Failed State-Building in Somalia**

*PhD research proposal*

*submitted to the Ecole Doctorale de Sciences Po  
en Sciences Politiques – Relations Internationales  
by Robert Kluijver (candidate # 20166300828)*

*on April 24, 2016*

The purpose of this PhD research is to examine why the international community's state-building efforts have been so unsuccessful, by examining in depth the particular case of Somalia. The sociocultural evolution of this country over the past decades and the political economy of its ongoing conflict will first be examined carefully; then, using an ethnographic approach, the worldviews of the many different interveners are deconstructed and related to International Relations theory, in an attempt to chart the rationale of the successive approaches to intervention. The actual impact of state-building efforts on Somali society is appraised next, as well as the strategies that Somalis develop to take advantage of, or resist, this impact. In Somalia, state-building takes place at two levels: the different processes of subnational state-formation, from independent Somaliland to the highly engineered central state of Galmudug, but also the forms of governance Al Shabaab applies in the areas it dominates, will offer interesting comparisons. From a study of these processes I hope to distil a new theory of 'state-building intervention' which will be tentatively tested on Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, and eventually Syria. Is it possible to contemplate a different architecture of intervention?

### **Why this research must be undertaken**

The collapse of the Somali state in 1991 was concurrent with the end of the Cold War; the multipolar world system that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union thus had to deal from the outset with a new phenomenon: failed states. Since then, the Western countries that form the core of what is called the 'international community' have intervened in many countries with the intention to support, rebuild or replace states deemed dysfunctional. The results have been poor at best, disastrous at worst. Despite considerable efforts, the state institutions put in place in Bosnia, East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia do not live up to many of the criteria of statehood: sovereignty, control of territory, sustainable institutional development and popular legitimacy. To the contrary, some of these countries have become hotbeds of resistance against the Western project to organize the world according to its own values and interests, creating a myriad of new problems.

State-building is in an impasse, which explains why the international community is so hesitant to deal with the crises that emerged in the Arab world from 2011 onwards. There is an urgent need for new approaches. The international intervention sector is well aware of its failures, and many new approaches have been tried successively; but this field has drawn comparatively little academic or other reflection – knee-jerk reactions have been the norm. International Relations theory has not really addressed this problem, despite some critique from, for example, the post-colonial school of thought. In fact, as I hope to demonstrate by examining the world-views of the interveners, IR theory may be part of the problem, as it sets the general framework that justifies state-building as an essential ingredient of intervention.

Non-intervention, in this interconnected global world with its many transnational relationships, is no longer an option; and simply shutting oneself off from 'failed' and 'failing' states is too costly in the long run, as the September 2001 attacks proved. The problem of state failure cannot be ignored. From a

cursory glance at past practices, it appears a critique of modalities, or searching for solutions within the existing interpretative frameworks of International Relations, is insufficient. A re-examination of the fundamental assumptions that underlie international interventions in places such as Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya must be attempted. The planned research must contribute to this effort.

### **Scope of the research**

The research focuses on Somalia, in the period 1991 – 2016, although, to understand the roots of the conflict, Somali political economy and sociocultural development, it will reach back into the past of this country and its people.

The successive and sometimes simultaneous phases of international intervention in Somalia since 1991 will all be covered, from the 'Blue Helmet' period of soft humanitarian intervention and Bush's New World Order, through neglect and the attempt to ignore, to the 'pre-emptive strike' doctrine of Cheney and the unfolding War on Terror, the 'Responsibility to Protect' principled and muscular humanitarian interventions, all the way to the pragmatic 'Afghan good enough' approach where democracy, human rights and other lofty goals are quietly put on the back-burner.

The formation of the Somali state through its successive incarnations will be the main object of study, but the regional states formed first autonomously (Somaliland and Puntland) and since 2012 in a programmatic way (Jubaland, Interim South West Administration, Galmudug state, and soon Hiraaan & Middle Shabelle) will also be examined closely. The manner in which Al Shabaab governs the territories it dominates will receive particular and unprecedented attention.

The research will cover the major players of the intervention industry in Somalia. The UN, The World Bank, regional state cooperation frameworks (African Union, IGAD, AMISOM), the European Union, bilateral donors, powerful neighbours (Ethiopia and Kenya), NGOs, peacekeepers and experts have all been involved in state-building in Somalia. The relevant interests and objectives of these players will be studied in their own terms, and their world-views related to hegemonic discourses in the field of international relations.

International Relations theories that justify or explain international interventions, and in particular state-building efforts, will be analysed to the extent that they influence policy-makers among all these different players. See below for some of the IR theories that will certainly be included.

Finally, the research will test the hypotheses at which it has arrived against other game-changing interventions of the past decades, in particular Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and eventually Syria, to verify if the interpretative framework it has resulted in can shed a useful light on these, so far unresolved, state-building failures.

### **Normative framework**

The increasing integration of all peoples that inhabit the surface of the earth is an undeniable fact, and a historic novelty; although a universal human community was anticipated by early philosophers and poets, it has now become a reality. This human community needs new forms of governance, as the current world system, to employ Wallerstein's concept, seems incapable of providing solutions to the problems of our age. In this sense the failure of international interventions points to the failure of international politics; and the incapacity to build states in societies where the state has collapsed points to fundamental inconsistencies in the state system, especially when one takes into consideration successful self-governance projects in conflict zones where the international community has not

expressly intervened (such as Rojava in Syria, or – up to a degree – Somaliland). Ideally, this research could help bring about new ways of thinking about international politics and the role of states in the evolution of societies.

### **Theoretical framework**

International interventions do not figure high on the list of topics traditionally treated by International Relations theory. A cursory look at the table of contents of IR theory readers indicates that topics such as foreign relations, international cooperation, security and even the environment are treated, but not interventions, despite the fact that they strongly shape the current world. This neglect is surprising, as IR theory traditionally revolves around conflict and cooperation between states and other actors, and interventions provide fascinating showcases where these different principles and actors are at work together. The reason may be that international interventions are complex and cross-disciplinary phenomena, not easily seized in one or the other theory.

An eclectic approach would probably be best suited to research state-building interventions: a realist assessment of the national interests pursued by individual intervening states, a neorealist focus on how regimes between states are preserved or strengthened by interventions, a liberal cosmopolitan view of the international agencies' attempts to build functioning state institutions, a post-colonial analysis of the aid industry and the resulting state of dependency, a feminist approach of gender roles in the intervention industry, etc. etc. However, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to draw these different analyses into a common comprehensive framework; therefore such an approach would ultimately turn out to be an unrewarding exercise.

I agree with post-positivists and Jim George (1994) that theory is not a cognitive reaction to reality but an integral part of the construction of reality. It is more rewarding to examine how each of the theories mentioned above has shaped the views of the associated practitioners, than trying to explain their actions through the theories, which would seem to be a tautological exercise. How worldviews shape results will be a focus of the research, as explained below.

This leaves unresolved my own theoretical framework. As Alex Macleod points out ('La Théorie des RI', in Balzacq & Ramel, 2013) each analysis is based on a theory, and the researcher should make it explicit. Building on the post-positivist reasoning my theory, then, is that science in general, and social sciences in particular, are primarily ideological exercises, whose undeclared purpose is to consolidate a narrative – or more precisely, a metanarrative (or metatheory or hegemonic discourse), i.e. a framework that makes sense of many different narratives that can thus coexist, such as a realist and a liberal and even the post-positivist narrative itself.

Unfortunately, however, the hegemonic narrative – which is carried not only by scholarship, but also by political discourse, the news or the entertainment industry – can no longer make sense of the world, and I believe (hypothesis to be tested) that this is the fundamental reason why interventions fail: the world no longer conforms to the narrative. This will become immediately apparent to a casual visitor in Somalia or Afghanistan, who will find, to his or her surprise, hospitable people leading a relatively good life, concerned mostly with the education of their children, instead of the expected miserable, parochial souls fleeing terrorism and state violence. The dominant narrative has become dysfunctional. The world needs a new one, or a plurality of narratives, in which transnational interventions to redress grave imbalances *do* work. The only manner in which such new narratives can be built is by a very careful and unbiased view of reality. This is why my research starts with a close study of Somalia, instead of with a theoretical framework, which will rather be the end result.

### **Key question**

*Why have state-building interventions of the international community in Somalia been marked by failure?*

Definitions are required of *intervention*, *international community* and *weak/fragile* and *collapsed/failed* or (my preferred term) *unsustainable states*.

### **Sub-questions and suggested approaches**

- a. What is the justification of intervention? Why does the international community intervene in weak and collapsed states?

Perspectives of realism versus liberal transnationalism. The objective here is not to engage in a theoretical debate (is intervention justified or justifiable? – this question will be addressed later) but to identify which are the main strands of thought that influence policy makers in the conception and implementation of international interventions (and how *they* justify intervention).

- From the realist perspective: the matrix of the War on Terror and the primacy of national security interests; US attempts at maintaining their power in a multipolar world. Kenneth Waltz's neorealism will be taken as a starting point, and Mearsheimer's offensive realism as well as Robert Gilpin's state-centric realism, as formulated around his critique of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, will add important perspectives.
- From the liberal internationalist and transnationalist perspective: the matrix of international peace, from the establishment of the League of Nations to the United Nations and the 'responsibility to protect'. Rosenau's affirmations in 'Turbulence in World Politics' about the emergence of collective movements at levels other than the state, and the resulting turbulence as they interact with the state system. Other important ideas are the normative concepts of world community as described by Ramel (2012), and how US foreign policy is shaped by both domestic and transnational pressures (as explained by e.g. Moravcsik, Keohane and Nye).
- Of particular relevance to this field are Just War theories, as developed from Francisco Suarez in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to Michael Walzer, Alex Bellamy (Responsibility to Protect) and others. Their discussion in the field of humanitarian intervention by Andreas Krieg (2012) forms a useful starting point.

- b. Who are the interveners, and what are their worldviews?

Review of the different actors in the Somali state-building field – UN, The World Bank, EU, AU, consultant experts, scholars, AMISOM and NGOs. Tentative analysis of how their worldviews (as based on the theories discussed above) influence outcomes.

- In the past years, several interesting anthropological, ethnographic and sociological studies have been made of the intervening international community. The daily routines, beliefs and approaches of peacekeepers were analysed by, for example, Béatrice Pouligny (Ils Nous Avaient Promis La Paix, 2004) and Séverine Autesserre (Peaceland, 2014). Similar studies have been made of the aid and development world by David Mosse (Adventures in Aidland, 2013) or Lisa Smirl (Spaces of Aid, 2015). The findings of these studies will be applied to the particular case of Somalia and enriched with the author's personal observations.
- Other, more theoretical studies have looked at international interventions from a wider angle, often post-colonial, and noted how the theory and practice of interveners relate closely to colonial projects (Duffield 2007 and 2013) or to the imposition of Western values (Easterly, 2015) and the establishment of a neoliberal world regime (Naomi Klein, 2008). There is a general consensus among these authors that the application of 'technical' and 'universal' solutions is

ideologically motivated and largely responsible for the failure in local contexts whose specifics and social dynamics are not taken into account (see also de Waal, 2015).

- As a result of this analysis, the question of the legitimacy of international interventions, as defined theoretically above, must be revisited. In the field of state-building, this is done convincingly by Richmond (Failed Statebuilding, 2014).

c. How do international interventions impact local society and politics?

Measuring the impact of international interventions on the local socio-political landscape appears difficult, as there is no 'standard population' to compare them to. However, one can look at tendencies prevalent in society before the intervention (dynamic view), traditional political culture (essentialist view) and study differences in local society and politics between the centre of intervention (usually the capital city and a few key regions) and its periphery (where the intervention has least effects). One may also compare to the evolution of neighbouring societies where no intervention takes place and more distant places where similar interventions happen.

- Alex de Waal (2015) has offered a convincing new interpretation of the politics in the Horn of Africa, including Somalia. International interveners are quite easily assimilated into local power politics, as traditional and upcoming leaders jockey for access to the interveners, which provide an important source of power among other more stable and traditional ones. Often the interveners have only a limited understanding of local power dynamics, making them flexible instruments in the hands of local elites; they show even less sensitivity to how their presence and resources deeply transform local societies. A close reading of recent Somali political history, relying heavily on vernacular sources, can elucidate how the state-building efforts of the international community have affected local politics.
- At the sociocultural level, other dynamics are at play. Worldviews, customs and practices of interveners interact in manifold ways with local societies (see for example Autesserre, 2014). One can take the new paradigm of security through excessive risk avoidance (and practically no 'acceptance') as an example of how such dynamics play out: the interveners cut themselves off from local societies to ensure their security. As a result the acceptance and patience of local communities for the interveners decreases. Another interesting example is how Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) programs impact religious perceptions in Somali society. A few case studies, based on existing and novel research and analysis, will illustrate the sociocultural impact of the international intervention in Somalia.
- To complement these case studies, a long-term view on the evolution of Somali society and its place in the world is required. The speed of sociocultural evolution in Africa and many other parts of the 'developing world' is impressive, and often misjudged or even ignored. How large is the impact of intervention on overall evolution (in Somalia, in our case) – and what is the direction of impact? Although this question may be difficult to answer, for lack of quantifiable data, it should at least be asked.

d. How could the international intervention in Somalia improve?

How can the findings of my research best be theorized? Can they be embedded within current IR debates, or do they require a different framework? Which one? And, once I have theorized my findings, how do alternative explanations for failed state-building in Somalia fit in? What is the practical value of my theory – or is it purely normative? Could the lessons learnt in Somalia be applied to other interventions, for example Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya? In short, can my findings be incorporated into intervention praxis? Can I suggest (some elements of) a new architecture of intervention?

- The findings of this research may need a reformulation of some basic assumptions of the intervention industry; to that effect, I expect to borrow from the work of contemporary philosophers like Giorgio Agamben, Foucault, Edgar Morin and others
- Once I have formulated a theory to explain the failure of the international intervention in Somalia, I will test it against the literature (and my own findings) produced in the contexts of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.
- Finally, I hope I can suggest an alternative architecture of intervention that can more efficiently achieve the given objectives of intervention – in keeping with the overall goal of fostering a more just and equal world community.

### **Rough outline of the thesis “Building failed states: the crisis of international interventions in Somalia and beyond”**

1. Field observations from Somalia: how has Somali society changed over the past decades – a historic perspective, going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Current developments in Somali society, culture and politics. The cases of Somaliland, Puntland, Jubaland, and the subnational state formation process. Islam and Islamism among Somalis, the genesis of Al Shabaab and its reality today. Somali clans and trends in the political economy of conflict.
2. History of the international intervention in Somalia since 1991. Examination of the intervention industry and its actors within existing IR theory. Understanding the world views of the interveners (sociological, anthropological and cultural notes) and how they are constituted by theory, while also taking into account the feedback loop: how the experiences of interveners are translated into shifting theoretical or narrative frameworks.
3. Appraisal of how the international intervention has impacted Somali sociocultural and political evolution, and how this evolution has influenced international state-building attempts in Somalia. Elaboration of a Somalia-specific international state-building model.
4. Testing this model against counterexamples (Somaliland) and a centre-periphery approach (Mogadishu versus rural areas); fine-tuning the model. Comparison with distant international state-building interventions (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya...). Consideration of alternative explanations for failure. Can the Somalia model be applied to other recent cases of failed state-building?
5. Reflections about the political philosophy of interventions, and recommendations for future interventions.

### **How the research will be organised**

#### *Access to field data*

Somalia – In April 2016 I have started working as Deputy Director and Head Research and Analysis for the International NGO Safety Organisation – Somalia. This will give me privileged access to the Somali field and its actors. Through my job, which requires extensive field work and analysis of information, I will also meet many if not most of the other actors working in the intervention industry in Somalia. I already have many contacts within the UN, the World Bank, the EU and the NGO community, as I have worked for all of these. I plan to quickly learn Somali, so that by the second year I should be able to consult sources in Somali.

#### *Methodology*

- Literature review (scholarly and popular)

- Consulting archives of NGOs, international agencies and online (incl. WikiLeaks)
- Field research in Somalia and in Nairobi (where most organizations working in Somalia have their headquarters)
  - Semi-structured key informant interviews (with intervenors and intervened)
  - Personal observations
- Local sources, besides field research: press clippings, online analyses

### *Timeline*

- Summer 2016 to Summer 2017: literature review and fieldwork Somalia
- Summer 2017 to Summer 2018: establishing theoretical framework, writing first chapters and further fieldwork in Somalia
- Summer 2018 to Summer 2019: sabbatical year for writing thesis
- Summer 2019 to Summer 2020: maximum extension for completing my thesis.

### *Financial aspects*

I will be sufficiently well paid in the first two years (if all goes well, which can be reasonably expected), to allow me to pay for at least one sabbatical year to write and finish the thesis. I can probably perform consultancies for organizations in related fields in Somalia and other countries (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria) if I feel I need to do additional fieldwork in the third year – in which case the thesis would probably not be finished until the fourth year. I will not require any form of financial support.

### **Bibliography**

*NB: This bibliography lists only books mentioned in this text, or that have directly influenced this research proposal. Specialist books on Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have been left out.*

*Practice – these are books or papers I have (partially) read and which inspired my approach, or which I know I must read to develop it*

Autesserre, Séverine - *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention* (Cambridge University Press, 2014)

Chambers, Robert - *Into the Unknown: Explorations in Development Practice* (Practical Action Publishing, 2014)

Duffield, Mark - *Development, Security and Unending War* (Polity, 2007)

Duffield, Mark & Hewitt, Vernon (editors) - *Empire, Development and Colonialism: The Past in the Present* (James Currey, 2013)

Easterly, William – *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

Easterly, William – *The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor* (Basic Books, 2015)

Holohan, Anne - *Networks of Democracy: Lessons from Kosovo for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond* (Stanford University Press, 2005)

Klein, Naomi – *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Penguin, 2008)

Krieg, Andreas - *Motivations for Humanitarian Intervention : Theoretical and Empirical Considerations* (Springer Briefs in Ethics, 2012)

Marchal, Roland – Somalie: un Nouveau Front Anti-terroriste? (Les Études du CERI #135, Juin 2007)

Marchal, Roland – The Puntland State of Somalia. A Tentative Analysis (CERI, 2010)

Marchal, Roland – The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War. Harakat al Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia (CERI, 2011)

Martinez, Luis - Libya from Paramilitary Forces to Militias: The Difficulty of Constructing a State Security Apparatus (Arab Reform Initiative, May 2014)

Martinez, Luis – Tunisie et Libye : L'Apprentissage de la Démocratie (Le Monde, Novembre 2011)

Martinez, Luis - Libye : une transition à l'épreuve du legs de la Jamahiriyya (Les Études du CERI #195, Juillet 2013)

Mosse, David - Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development (Berghahn Books, 2013)

Paris, Roland and Sisk, Timothy - Understanding the Contradictions of Postwar Peacebuilding *in* Miall, Woodhouse, Ramsbotham & Mitchell (editors) - The Contemporary Conflict Resolution Reader (Polity Press 2015)

Pouligny, Béatrice - Ils nous avaient promis la paix : Opérations de l'ONU et populations locales (Presses de Sciences Po, 2014)

Richmond, Oliver - Failed Statebuilding: Intervention and the Dynamics of Peace Formation (Yale University Press, 2014)

Smirl, Lisa - Spaces of Aid: How Cars, Compounds and Hotels Shape Humanitarianism (Zed Books, 2015)

Waal, Alex de – The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power (Polity Press, 2015)

*Theory – these are the books I want to read to enrich my understanding of IR theory*

Agamben, Giorgio – Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Stanford University Press, 1998)

Agamben, Giorgio – Stasis: Civil War as Political Paradigm (Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

Agamben, Giorgio – The Use of Bodies (Stanford University Press, 2016)

Ashley, Richard – Political Realism and Human Interests (International Studies Quarterly Vol. 25 (2), June 1981)

Ashley, Richard & Walker, Robert (editors) – Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident Thought in International Studies (International Studies Quarterly 34(3) Sept 1990)

Battistella, Dario – Théorie des Relations Internationales, 5e édition (Presses de Sciences Po, 2015)

Bellamy, Alex – The Responsibility to Protect: a Defense (Oxford University Press, 2014)

Cox, Robert & Sinclair, Timothy – Approaches to World Order (Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Devin, Guillaume – Sociologie des Relations Internationales (2002, Ed. La Découverte 2013)

Foucault, Michel – L'Archéologie du Savoir (1969, Ed. Gallimard 2008)

Fukuyama, Francis – State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century (Profile Books, 2005)

George, Jim – Discourses of Global Politics: a Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations (Lynne Rienner, 1994)

Habermas, Jürgen – The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate (Polity Press, 1995)



Linklater, Andrew – *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, sovereignty and humanity* (Routledge, 2007)

Macleod, Alex – *La Théorie des RI in Balzacq, Thierry and Ramel, Frédéric (editors) – Traité de Relations Internationales* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2013)

Ramel, Frédéric – *L'Attraction Mondiale* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2012)

Rosenau, James – *Turbulence in World Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1990)

Singer, Peter – *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (Yale University Press, 2004)