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### **Somalia: From Autocracy to Anarchy, and Towards a Fragile Democracy**

Somalia's political history is characterized by dramatic shifts that reflect the country's ongoing struggle to balance democracy, authoritarianism, and state collapse. Since gaining independence, Somalia has experienced three main political phases, which are a brief period of democracy, a lengthy military dictatorship, and a turbulent era of anarchy, followed by attempts to restore democracy.

The first significant event was Somalia's independence in 1960, marking the beginning of a nine-year era of constitutional democracy. This period is often seen as the most hopeful in Somalia's modern history. Power was transferred peacefully through elections, making Somalia one of the few African nations to hold free and fair elections at that time. Aden Abdulle Osman, Somalia's first president, handed over power peacefully to his democratically elected successor, Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, in a transition that symbolized political maturity and public trust. Unfortunately, the assassination of Sharmarke in 1969 created a political vacuum. Then General Mohamed Siad Barre and his military faction staged a bloodless coup, bringing an end to Somalia's democratic experiment.

The second phase spanned from 1969 to 1991, which was Siad Barre's military rule that lasted 21 years. These were considered the golden two decades by Barre's supporters. His government introduced the Somali written alphabet, expanded educational services, and presented a strong image of unity. However, critics argue that his rule marked a departure from Somalia's democratic path. The regime became authoritarian, silencing opposition and consolidating power with an iron fist. What started with promises of nationalism and progress ultimately descended into repression, corruption, and clan-based favoritism. By the late 1980s, opposition movements, mainly organized along clan lines, began to emerge against the regime. Civil war persisted, and in 1991, Siad Barre was overthrown, leading to a period of chaos.

The Third phase of Somalia's politics was after the ousting of Siad Barre from power. The fall of Barre's regime plunged Somalia into years of fragmentation and statelessness. Rival clan-based militias carved out territories, creating a patchwork of self-declared mini-states. The lack of central authority fueled civil war, mass displacement, famine, and piracy. Religious extremist groups also emerged, adding further complexity to the conflict.

Instead of restoring democracy, the victorious rebels failed to establish a broad-based government. The promise of liberation gave way to lawlessness, clan rivalries, and cycles of violence. This period inflicted deep damage on Somalia's social fabric, economy, and institutions, damage that persists. However, Somalia's politics shifted again in 2000 after the formation of the first Transitional Federal Government. From 2000, international and regional efforts helped Somalia to revitalize attempts at state-building. The creation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004, followed by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in 2012, marked the slow process of re-establishing central authority.

Although fragile and troubled by internal divisions, state institutions were rebuilt, federal states started to emerge, and democratic processes began, though imperfect, at the beginning to take shape. Security remains a challenge, especially with the threat from extremist groups, but positive progress has been made in governance, infrastructure, and economic recovery. On top of the challenges mentioned above, Somalia is a victim of external Interference and Geopolitical Competition. Its strategic location along the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden has made it vulnerable to external interference. Some foreign powers have sought to exploit Somalia's weakness for their own interests, undermining its sovereignty. Others still have contributed positively by supporting stabilization and humanitarian aid.

Despite these pressures, Somalia retains unique strengths. Its people share a common language, culture, and religion, a rare unity in a region often divided along ethnic lines. This homogeneity could provide a foundation for reconciliation and rapid state-building, if leadership can rise above clan divisions and foreign manipulation.

Somalia cannot afford renewed cycles of unrest or fragmentation. The country needs a unifying national project that transcends clan politics and religious extremism. A project focusing on inclusive governance and national development. History offers a clear lesson. Nations that repeat the same mistakes, such as clan-based hysteria, authoritarianism, and foreign dependency, remain caught in cycles of conflict. Somalia must break this pattern. Its people need to seek a future where the state functions effectively, democracy is meaningful, and sovereignty is respected. In a rapidly evolving world characterized by global conflicts and shifting power dynamics, we prioritize building stability domestically, and the international community, in turn, should respect Somalia's sovereignty and support efforts that genuinely empower its people.

Once a beacon of hope in Africa, Somalia's potential has not been lost despite decades of turmoil. With unity, wise leadership, and resilience, Somalia can once again assume a vital role in the region, in Africa, and on the global stage, and the global stage.