

Committee: Trusteeship Council

Agenda Item: The Trust Territory of Western Samoa

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Introduction

To oversee the decolonization of colonial dependent territories, the 1945 San Francisco Conference drew a provision to create a new UN body, under Chapter 12 of the UN Charter, namely the Trusteeship Council. The United Nations Charter, which succeeded the League of Nations mandate system, created an international trusteeship system to administer those dependent areas (colonies and mandated territories), naming them "trust territories." Eventually, 11 territories — seven in Africa and four in Oceania — were placed under trusteeship. Italian Somaliland was the 11th trust territory; the other ten were League of Nations mandates.

Via a series of protectorate treaties, Italy gradually took over much of the area in the 1880s. The Somali opposition to Italian expansion started in the north in the 1890s, with the anti-colonial Dervish movement during the Bimaal and Wa'dan uprisings around Merca. After a two-year military struggle with Somali separatists, by the end of 1927 Rome finally exerted control over the whole of Italian Somaliland.

In 1936, the Somalia Governorate was established in that area, part of Italian East Africa. The area would remain under these arrangements until 1941, when Italy lost it in the World War II East African campaign. After that, until 1950, British troops administered Italian Somalia, which in turn was placed under Italian control as the Trust Territory of Somalia and became a United Nations trusteeship. British Somaliland and the Trust Territory of Somalia united to form the Somali Republic on July 1, 1960.

To understand the influence of the United Nations Trusteeship Council on the institution and state of the Somali Republic, this study guide attempts to provide comprehensive narratives regarding the Trusteeship Council's history and operations, the case of Italian Somaliland, and Somaliland history.

Definition of Key Terms

Trusteeship Council: One of the primary UN bodies, the Trusteeship Council, was created to oversee the management of trust territories during their transformation from colonies to independent states. When Palau, the final of the original 11 trust territories, became independent in 1994, the Council ceased operations.

Trust Territories: The United Nations trust territories were the successors of the remaining League of Nations mandates, and came into being when the League of Nations ceased to exist in 1946. All the trust territories were administered through the United Nations Trusteeship Council and authorized to a single country.

Trust Territory of Somaliland: Italian Somaliland became a United Nations trusteeship known as the Trust Territory of Somaliland. Under Italian administration, this trust territory lasted ten years, from 1950 to 1960, with legislative elections held in 1956 and 1959.

Colonial Rule: The practice of controlling another country or region and exploiting its people and resources; in Somalia, the political structure imposed by Italy, was marked by cultural oppression and economic exploitation.

Somali Republic: Following the union of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland, a single state was created in 1960.

Decolonization: The action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent. Popularized as a movement during the 1940s.

Major Actors Involved

First European Interest (19th Century)

European interest in Somali territories, including the area that subsequently became Italian Somaliland, was characterized early by the wider context of the "Scramble for Africa" in the late 19th century. The Scramble for Africa was the invasion, annexation, occupation, colonization, and establishment of protectorates of most of Africa by seven Western European powers during the period of "New Imperialism" between the years 1833 and 1914: Spain, Belgium, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, Portugal, and France, driven by the Second Industrial Revolution.

Because of its port facilities and proximity to the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, European powers saw Somalia as a strategic location from the late 19th century onward for dominating trade routes, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Britain, France, and Italy vied for the power to dominate the Horn of Africa in order to ensure maritime superiority and frustrate one another's ambitions. Europeans were interested in Somalia as it had few natural resources, coastal ports, agricultural sectors, and green land. Participation in the larger imperial "civilizing mission" and Christian missionary efforts also provided an ideological justification for their participation. European powers began to establish protectorates starting with treaties with local chiefs, which paved the way for subsequent colonization of Somali territories.

Italy (the Administering Authority):

Article 83 of the UN Charter — Italy had to be the administering authority under the UN trusteeship. In order to restore the region and prepare for independence, the Italians sought to improve the legislative framework and

modernize infrastructure. Critics say the administration favored Italian interests over the welfare of Somalis and too often echoed colonial practices.

British Military Administration (BMA)

The British Military Administration governed Singapore and Malaya between the Japanese surrender and the restoration of civilian rule on April 1, 1946. After World War II, Britain established a protectorate over Italian Somaliland that remained until 1950. Insisted on stability and rebuilding infrastructure in the aftermath of World War II.

Invasion of Geopolitical Neighbors and Global Powers:

Britain: As the ruling power in British Somaliland, Britain affected regional politics. The union of Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland was established following negotiations among international powers and local authorities, which led to the formation of the Somali Republic.

Ethiopia: A regional power with interests in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia had complicated relationships with Somali regions that were often shaped by regional politics and border disputes.

East African Campaign of World War II: The Allies initiated the critical East African Campaign of World War II against Italian forces in Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, and Ethiopia in June 1940, which continued until November 1941. This location allowed the Italians to capture key locations in the area after joining the war in 1940. To recapture the region, the Allies — chiefly, British Commonwealth forces — mounted a counteroffensive. Other key battles during the campaign included the capture of Addis Ababa and the capture of Kismayo. Italy's reign over East Africa fell apart when the Allies defeated their forces in November 1941, leading eventually to reforms in the governance of the region. This campaign was a testament to the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa during the conflict.

General Overview of the Issue

Historical Background

The Legacy of Colonialism East of the Suez After World War II, eleven territories, including Italian Somaliland, were entrusted to the UN Trusteeship Council. But trusteeship was not the discipline's first experience with foreign hegemony. During the Scramble for Africa in the late 19th century, Italy attempted to become one of the European colonial powers and claimed parts of Somali territory through military incursions and treaties with local authorities.

Although Somalia holds a scarce amount of natural resources, it was considered an attractive target for colonization due to its strategic location near the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, along with its agricultural prospects. By the early 20th century, most of the opposition in the area, including rebellions by the Bimaal and Wa'dan clans, had been crushed by Italy. But anti-colonial sentiment did not wane, and for several decades, resistance movements like Sayyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassan's Dervishes continued to fight against foreign control. By 1927, Italy was in control of much of the country, and following the annexation of Ethiopia in 1936, Ethiopia then became a part of Italian East Africa.

In Italian Somaliland, World War II was a watershed. The area subsequently fell under the control of the British Military Administration (BMA) following Italy's defeat in the 1940–1941 East African Campaign. Besides rebuilding war-damaged infrastructure, the British were seeking to stabilize the region. As a consequence of its post-war geopolitical environment, in 1950, the United Nations trusteeship system was born to become a more orderly method of governing. To prepare Italian Somaliland for independence within a decade, the region was placed under the authority of Italy.

Struggles in Economy and Development

During the trusteeship, one of the most pressing issues of Italian Somaliland was its economic underdevelopment. After decades of colonial control, the region's economy was largely dependent on subsistence agriculture and the production of cash crops, such as sugarcane and bananas, for export. These products were cultivated on large Italian estates, which is part of the reason local farmers lacked resources and fertile land.

Economic policies during the colonial era favored Italian interests, exploiting the area's agricultural resources without consideration for the needs of its people. Ports, railroads, and irrigation systems were built not to promote local economic development, but to facilitate the export of goods. By the time of the trusteeship, Italian Somaliland was hardly industrialized, access to markets was limited, and nearly the entire population was illiterate.

The trusteeship administration was concerned with such economic disparities. Italy implemented programs to diversify the economy, modernize infrastructure, and update agriculture. There was limited progress, particularly in port facility rehabilitation and road network expansion across towns, including Mogadishu. These measures, however, didn't fix the economy's fundamental flaws. The region's capacity for generating long-term economic growth was weak, and it remained heavily reliant on international assistance.

Poverty and unemployment were rife, especially in rural areas where most of the population lived. Because access to opportunities and resources was often dictated by clan-based divisions, these divisions made any efforts to advance economic growth much more difficult. Due to the absence of a consolidated economic base under the trusteeship, Italian Somaliland was also vulnerable to any changes in world commodity prices.

Social and Political Organizations

During the trusteeship period, there was a tremendous emphasis on building political institutions and democratic self-government. But these were also conditioned by the legacies of colonial rule, which crushed the traditional system of government and imposed a centralized administration.

Political and Social Systems

If we look closely at the trusteeship period, it was a period of significant efforts at promoting self-rule and setting up political institutions. Colonialism did impose a centralized administrative framework and undermined traditional governance systems and had suffered its bitter pills in those initiatives.

Clan life heavily influenced the dynamics of the political structure. In Somalia, social, political, and economic interactions are still deeply rooted in the clan-based structures. Efforts to create a unified national identity during the trusteeship period were often stymied by disputes between clans. Because clan ties and animosities often took precedence over political processes, this fragmentation posed significant challenges to governance.

Social Developments

Health care, along with education, mattered immensely during the trusteeship. The administration sought to increase access to basic and secondary education to create a workforce skilled to support an independent state. But literacy rates remained low, and progress slow. The imbalance in educational opportunities, with people shifting to urban areas, left rural native folks with little regard.

Health programs targeted common diseases, particularly tuberculosis and malaria. Big cities had hospitals and clinics, but rural areas had scant access to health care. The lack of investment in rural infrastructure and services left large swaths of the population on the margins of society.

International Relationship and Strategic Value

The strategic position of Italian Somaliland in the Horn of Africa made it a focal point for regional and global powers. Suitably positioned at the confluence of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, the region controlled key maritime routes, particularly to the Suez Canal. In the colonial and trusteeship periods, it was more valuable because of its strategic importance.

Regionally, Ethiopia, a neighbor, took a keen interest in the Horn of Africa when Emperor Haile Selassie was in power. Ethiopia and Somali officials long struggled over Ethiopia's territorial aspirations and desire to assert regional dominance. These tensions affected the governance of the trusteeship as Italy and the U.N. tried to reconcile competing claims and prevent regional violence.

British interests in the area were another factor. Arabic-speaking peoples of Eritrea and British Somaliland were completely open to British rule, and Britain had a major voice in negotiations to unify Somaliland as its ruling territory. These complex regional dynamics culminated in the unification of Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland in 1960.

Cold War Backdrop

The trusteeship period fitted within the early stages of the Cold War, where competing Western and Soviet interests turned the Horn of Africa into a theater of conflict. Both blocs tried to increase their influence in the region by controlling the policies of the Trusteeship Council and the administration authority. Geopolitical factors overshadowed the needs and aspirations of the Somali people and stymied attempts to build a stable and independent state.

The Soviet Union and the United States were both eager at the time to extend their military and political influence over Somalia, as they viewed the country as a potential ally in the broader Cold War struggle. This broader international rivalry became entangled in the trusteeship, which was in the

hands of the United Nations and administered by Italy. When the United States joined Western Europe in its anti-Soviet stance, its goal was to prevent the Soviets from dominating strategically important regions. The Soviet Union sought to align itself in the 1960s with nationalist socialist and anti-colonial movements in order to pull newly independent nations into its orbit, through the provision of economic, diplomatic, and military support.

Although it was supposed to prioritize the welfare and self-determination of the Somali people, the decisions of the Trusteeship Council were influenced by competition between the two superpowers as they pursued their goals in the Horn of Africa. Somalia's quest for independence was often at cross-purposes with the interests of international powers and Cold War geopolitics, making it difficult to set up a stable and independent state. Colonial superpowers such as the US and the USSR used “soft power” diplomacy during the trusteeship period to increase political and economic aid to Somali officials, whom they perceived to be advantageous for their respective blocs.

This scenario was complicated by the fact that Italy was the administering power. Yet Italy, a major European power despite its defeat in World War II, still had interests in the region. While its motivations were derived from the pressures of the Cold War, as well as its desire to maintain relations with its former colony, Italy had the ability to influence the situation because, as the administering power under the UN trusteeship, it still maintained some sway. Both internal and external pressures resulted in the Italian government's attempts to push through social reforms, infrastructure development, and democratic civil governance being erratic at best. As a result of the administration's transitional focus away from competing international interests, the Somali people have struggled to take full advantage of the system of trusteeship.

The Cold War backdrop also exacerbated regional tensions. Ethiopia, a neighboring monarchy led by Emperor Haile Selassie, found itself drawn into territorial disputes with Somalia that took on the dimensions of its strategic

interests in the region. The rise of Somali nationalism was a nightmare for the Ethiopian government, which had closer ties to the United States, especially after Somali leaders announced their ambition to create a “Greater Somalia” that would incorporate Somali-speaking areas in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. The Cold War politics in the region's conflicts, such as the Somalia-Ethiopia conflicts, also created a political environment that made it difficult for Somalia to seek independence.

The Cold War rivalry between the US and USSR had a considerable influence on the political development of Italian Somaliland during its trusteeship period. Somali aspirations for self-determination and their ambitions were subsumed under geopolitical and ideological goals in international competition over influence in the Horn of Africa. Given that the path to sovereignty for Somalia was impacted by the competing interests of the world's superpowers, this interference in Somalia's transition from colonial control to independence made it increasingly challenging to craft a stable, unified, and self-sustaining society.

Challenges to the Trusteeship Council

Italian Somaliland's progress toward independence was carefully overseen by the Trusteeship Council, created to oversee the administration of the trust territory. But practical and structural challenges limited its effectiveness.

It was up to the administering authority to determine how to implement the Council's primarily advisory recommendations. This reliance on Italy to act in good faith often led to conflicts of interest because Italy prioritized its own strategic and economic interests. In addition, the broader geopolitical context—including Cold War adversaries and regional tensions—constrained the Council's ability to fulfill its tasks.

Path to Independence

The trusteeship ended, and the two territories were united as the Somali Republic on July 1, 1960. This milestone is instantly the final of colonialism and the start of a brand new period in Somali history. However the colonial and trusteeship era legacies of economic dependency, clan-based divisions, and weak institutions remained structural constraints in the development of the Somali Republic.

Italian Somaliland's experience reminds us of the complexities of decolonization and international governance. The Trusteeship Council served as a mechanism to address historical injustices, and the success of such a mechanism was dependent on the goodwill of administering powers, the tenacity of local populations, and the backing of the international community. Its tale is illuminating for anyone involved in efforts to rebuild countries these days after conflict and oppression.

World War II

Italian East Africa—then including Italian Somaliland—had been a colonial entity since Italy's invasion and annexation of Ethiopia in 1936. The fascist ideology of Benito Mussolini and Italy's ambitions to create an empire, with Mussolini's goal of expanding Italy's influence in Africa, were consistent with his aim to expand Italy's presence in Africa. But these aspirations were ephemeral, as World War II would bring dramatic changes to Italy's fortunes.

Italian supremacy in the Horn of Africa was effectively ended when British Commonwealth forces defeated Italian forces there during the East African Campaign (1940–1941). British Military Administration (BMA) ruled Italian Somaliland from 1941 until it became a United Nations trust territory in 1950. While signaling the end of Italy's empire, the war's end also opened

participation in governance through foreign intervention in Somaliland and other previous Italian possessions.

The victory of the Allies and the subsequent defeat of the Axis nations resulted in a reconfiguration of global governance. Areas formerly under Axis control were liberated or placed under international supervision due to post-war settlements. The United Nations, established in 1945, played a major role in this process through the creation of the Trusteeship Council. Italian Somaliland was one of the eleven territories that came under this arrangement, marking a radical departure from colonial rule to one of administration under international supervision.

The role of the Trusteeship Council was to oversee their administration. The Trusteeship Council would meet as and when necessary. The United Nations Charter established the Trusteeship Council to oversee the administration of trust territories, including Italian Somaliland. Ordained with this duty, the Council had to ensure that social progress, economic development, and self-governance were prominent in the administration of these regions. The League of Nations mandate system was replaced by the Trusteeship Council to reflect the increasing international consensus on decolonization and the right of nations to self-govern.

When Italian Somaliland was entrusted to the trusteeship in 1950, Italy was acknowledged as the administrative power. This decision had been contentious because Italy had recently occupied both of those territories, having been defeated in World War II as an Axis power. But by helping lead Italian Somaliland, through independence under international supervision, the deal was also intended to offer the country a chance to atone for its ,and required annual reports assessing social progress, economic development, and governance. The Council reviewed these reports and provided recommendations to ensure the region was preparing for independence. The Council also made occasional trips to trust territories, including Italian Somaliland, to interact with local leaders and assess the situation on the ground.

Timeline of Important Events

Date:	Event:
Late 19th century	Italy gains control over Somali territories during the "Scramble for Africa."
1927	Italian forces suppress anti-colonial uprisings and establish full control over Italian Somaliland.
1941	British forces take control of Italian Somaliland after Italy's defeat in East Africa.
1950	Italian Somaliland becomes a UN trust territory under Italian administration.
1956	First legislative elections held in the trust territory.
1960	Italian Somaliland merges with British Somaliland to form the Somali Republic.

Past Solution Attempts

During the trusteeship period, several efforts were made to address the challenges faced by Italian Somaliland and prepare it for independence. The UN Trusteeship Council oversaw Italy's administration with annual progress reports and field visits to ensure its mandate was being fulfilled. Italy introduced social services such as healthcare and education, established rudimentary governance structures, and held legislative elections in 1956 and 1959. However such initiatives were often undone by insufficient financing, irregular implementation, and the legacy of colonial extraction.

Moreover, the reliance on clan-based politics and the prioritization of the Italian economy over regional development led to contradictory results, leaving many systemic issues unresolved by the time of independence.

Possible Solutions

Addressing the problem in Italian Somaliland will have more success when the attention turns to establishing sustainable governance arrangements and promoting economic growth and social integration. Raising literacy levels and strengthening educational efforts to produce future leaders can help the people start to govern themselves. Economic policy must prioritize upgrading agriculture, diversifying industries, and building infrastructure to reduce the dependence on external assistance and establish sustainable lives. Overcoming clan-based differences is critical; programs fostering communication, diversity, and a common sense of national identity can diminish hostilities and improve social cohesion. Enhanced international governance with clear standards and regular assessments could ensure accountability and progress, aligning the functioning of the governing body with the missions of the Trusteeship Council. With a few holistic, all-inclusive measures, we can set the stage for a stable, independent, and prosperous state.

Useful Links

Italian Somaliland History, Map, Significance & Facts

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Italian-Somaliland>

Trusteeship Council

<https://www.dagdok.org/w/dd/en/un-system/trusteeship-council>

Bibliography

Trust Territory of Somaliland

The Trust Territory of Somaliland, officially the "Trust Territory of Somaliland under Italian administration" (Italian: Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana della Somalia), was a United Nations Trust Territory from 1950 to 1960, following the dissolution of the former British Military ...

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trust_Territory_of_Somaliland

Italian Somaliland - UN Trusteeship Council Documentation - Research Guides at United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library

The trust territory of Italian Somaliland and the British Somaliland protectorate became Somalia.

<https://research.un.org/en/docs/tc/somaliland>

Italy's Short-lived Success in Somaliland - Warfare History Network

The Italian invasion of British Somaliland ended in victory, but months later British troops recaptured the colony.

<https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/italys-short-lived-success-in-somaliland/>