

Somalia's Prospect

Africa Briefing Report
Brussels – 2 July 2010



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List of Acronyms

AMISOM: African Union Mission for Somalia

ARS : Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia

ASWJ: Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a

AU: African Union

DPA: Djibouti Peace Agreement

IGAD: Intergovernmental Authority for Development

SCIC: Supreme Council of the Islamic Courts (also known as the ICU: Islamic Courts Union)

TFG: Transitional Federal Government

Introduction

Somalia has been facing security and governance challenges for more than two decades. The bombing and shelling in 1988 of the second city of the country, Hargeysa, followed by the collapse of the Siyaad Barre's dictatorship, plunged the country into a violent civil war. International efforts to establish a functional central government have so far proven elusive, and in some cases, counterproductive. Despite the 2008 UN-brokered Peace Agreement in Djibouti, the situation on the ground remains very tense, particularly in southern-central Somalia. The internationally sponsored Transitional Federal Government has not yet managed to expand its authority further than a few blocks in Mogadishu. The humanitarian situation is highly critical, and has been aggravated by the resurgence of violence since 2006. The flows of refugees to neighboring countries put an additional strain on the political stability of the region, while the allegiance of Shabaab to al-Qaeda in 2007 reinforced the fear that Somalia might become a safe-haven for transnational jihadi terrorists to launch attacks in the region, and possibly in Western countries. Given these considerations, Somalia has been of a growing concern for the international community, who has focused on the visible and recurrent effects of these crises (anti-piracy, regional containment, counterterrorism).

However, a more comprehensive approach towards the Somalia crisis should be adopted that would address the root causes of conflict and violence. Somalia crises derive from a complex web of local, regional and international factors: these connections have to be taken into account for sustainable crisis resolution. The aim of this meeting was to provide an update and analysis of the challenges of the Somalia crisis, to explore its nature, and to assess current and new crisis management approaches. The briefing also proposed a number of recommendations towards peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Terrorism, counterterrorism and Somalia crises

Since the controversial UN and US interventions from 1992 to 1994, Somalia has been treated at best by international indifference. It is only with the recent issues of terrorism and piracy that Somalia has reappeared on the international agenda. Twenty years after the start of the civil war, the situation looks both similar and very different.

The forcible ouster of the Islamic Courts Union by Ethiopia in December 2006, followed by the installation of the TFG in Mogadishu in January 2007, sparked a complex insurgency throughout Southern Somalia. Four years after, up to 80% of the territory has been captured by the armed Islamist opposition groups (al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islaam) opposed to the Ethiopian intervention, while the TFG failed to bring stability to the country. Although terrorism and Somalia have been somewhat linked since at least a decade¹, this chaotic situation opened a new

¹ One can think about the 1998 bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam which implicated Somali terrorists.

window of opportunity for foreign jihadist groups, including Al Qaeda, who sought to globalize Somalia's conflict through the support of its most extremist group, like al-Shabaab, and the importation of al-Qaeda tactics. Meanwhile, the country has been facing a severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation, since the insecurity prevailing in Southern Somalia prevents humanitarian agencies from gaining access to the populations. It looks as if nothing had changed since the 1990 civil war: Somalia would be doomed to exist in a chronic state of violent anarchy.

Things are actually quite different from the early 1990s. First of all, until the mid 2000s, Somalia, while having no central government, has been relatively peaceful, especially the Northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland. Second, the framework of analysis of the current Somalia crisis has radically changed: in the 09/11 context, Somalia has been considered by the Bush administration as one of the new fronts of the "war on terror". Whereas the presence of al-Qaeda in Somalia is not questioned, the interpretation of the conflict as part of the "global jihad" proves to be overstated. The questions remains open so far, whether al-Qaeda has a structural role in the Somalia conflict, or whether it should be considered as a surrogate force for national insurgency. A closer look should be taken at the internal dynamics of the crisis.

The international actors' policies towards Somalia are currently framed by counterterrorism, considered as a top priority for the US. The current policy delivers mostly containment of the conflict, at the expense of addressing the root causes of the crisis. This approach could produce several counterproductive effects:

- Consolidate the credentials of the armed opposition to the TFG, by openly claiming to resist any foreign intervention.
- Radicalize Muslim communities in Eastern Africa and abroad. It should be reminded that the Diaspora appears to play a prominent role in the terrorist attacks in Somalia, since most of them were perpetrated by Somalis from the Diaspora. In other words, the terrorist issue should be considered in a broad regional and international perspective, as the July 2010 attacks in Kampala clearly demonstrate).
- Threaten the relative stability of other parts of Somalia not yet affected by the war, such as Puntland and Somaliland.

Somalia's State failure: what's next?

Although a number of decentralized administrative democratic structures have developed in the last twenty years, particularly in northern Somalia and in some pockets in the South, the country has been without a central government since the fall of Barre's dictatorship and consequently labeled as one of the worst "failed state" in the world. Considering the complexity of Somalia's political system, the international community has been pushing for the establishment of a federal state, while Somali entrepreneurs claimed for a recognition of the "clan factor". The TFG institutions are therefore based on the "4.5 formula", in order to balance and share

representation and power in Somalia between the four main clan families, as well as five minority constituencies.

The notion of federalism is however understood in many different ways by Somalis: there appears to be no consensus over these questions, about whether the government should be unitary, federal or confederal, and whether the northern territory of Somaliland should be granted independence. The sources of the conflicts derive in part from this lack of understanding over power-sharing, in addition to long-lasting tensions over identification of clan territory and resources between clans. The problem so far is that no real progress has been made during the last years: the new constitution draft that should soon be proposed to the TFG and the Parliament is for instance largely an exogenous process led by foreign experts, and therefore does not reflect well on these realities.

The escalation of violence since 2006 has led to a growing polarization of Somalis. The main political actors of the crises either failed or were unwilling to reach a power-sharing agreement that could halt the conflict.

Actors of the conflict

The TFG

The TFG was created in 2004 as a result of a two years internationally sponsored negotiation process between the warring factions in Nairobi. While being the sole internationally recognized interlocutor, the TFG lacks both capacity and legitimacy. Although it benefits from military and diplomatic support, it has failed to improve the general security situation, even in Mogadishu, as well as in providing basic services to the Somalis. Dysfunctional and politically isolated, the TFG has also been perceived as an Ethiopian proxy, further alienating support from large sections of the population. These shortfalls have not prevented a renewed support from international actors, for it was assumed that the TFG was the most viable option. Indeed, TFG is needed because it provides a legal framework for intervention and Western counterterrorist policies.

Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ)

The formation of ASWJ results from an attempt to build popular reactions against the most radical branch of the armed insurgency, Al-Shabaab. Consisting of a Sufi alliance of the central regions of Hiiran and Galgudud, ASWJ has long been seen as a moderate Islamic movement in defense of traditional Sufi practices. ASWJ has met with some politically and military successes, and notably managed to regain some territories previously controlled by Al-Shabaab. Yet, Addis-Ababa has acquired a substantial influence on its leadership.

A power-sharing agreement was signed in March 2010 between the TFG and ASWJ, which guaranteed ministerial and diplomatic posts to ASWJ members. This provoked a schism within ASWJ, between those who entered government and those who refused to recognize the deal. Moreover, some members of the TFG are still opposed to any ASWJ participation in the government. The hopes of a gradual unification of the Somali political scene remain therefore highly elusive, notwithstanding the fact that ASWJ is as well as the TFG widely considered as a surrogate force for Ethiopia. Addis-Ababa has indeed been providing ASWJ with extensive military and logistic support in its fight against Shabaab.

Armed insurgencies: Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islaam

Created from the dismantling of the UIC by the Ethiopian army, Al-Shabaab is the most important, well organised and popular armed group opposed to the TFG. While not undermining the dangers posed by Al-Shabaab, notably its ability to build recruitment networks of fighters inside and outside Somalia, these dangers should not be overstated. Despite some highly prominent attacks and terror incidents against Westerners and international workers, on the ground, Shabaab commanders appear to be able to hold on a more moderate stand. Some have for instance not implemented its policies against Sufi Islam, while providing some sense of public good and offering alternatives to the youth, in the areas under its control. Though Al-Shabaab used to be very popular, its popularity has been recently eroded because of its authoritarian and rigorist Islamic rule. Al-Shabaab is a very heterogeneous organization, with divisive leaderships. Eventually, one should distinguish between those Shabaab members who have a Somalia agenda, and those with international interests. Transnational terrorists, while posing real security challenges, might represent only a minority of Shabaab's components. It must however be reminded that the failure or the misleading of the current peace process could lead to further radicalization of segments of the al-Shabaab components and foster Al Qaeda influence on the groups.

Hizbul Islaam was created in February 2009 as an alliance of four Islamist dissident organizations opposed to the UN-sponsored Djibouti peace process. While its leader had previously made a tactical alliance with Al-Shabaab, it seems that Hizbul Islaam is also the heir of the former clan and militia system plus a genuinely Islamist organization. There are actually few differences, if any, between the Islamic leaders of Hizbul Islaam and those who became part of the TFG through the Djibouti process. Members of the two groups occasionally cooperate, on the basis of clan allegiance and personal ties. Besides, the tactical alliance between Hizbul Islam and Al-Shabaab did not last long, as the former allies fought over the control of some areas in Southern Somalia. The schism among the radical insurgency groups could open a window of opportunity for the peace process.

These armed groups are considered as a priority security concern for international actors in general, and for the US government in particular. Both stand high on the terrorist group list of the US authorities, and both are viewed as a major threat for the stability of the entire region.

Somaliland and Puntland: Towards Somalias's balkanization?

The situation in Puntland and Somaliland is rather different, more stable and secure than in the south part of Somalia, though still fragile. Both regions become de-facto states respectively in May 1991 and August 1998. While Puntland has never claimed independence from Somalia, and still perceives itself as part of a future federal state, Somaliland has been craving international recognition of the territory as an independent nation, a claim that never receive any support from international community, despite a relatively impressive record in democratic governance and institution building, the last being the victory of the political opposition leader at the June 2010 elections. However, there is a growing concern that the Northern territories of Puntland and Somaliland might also become the stage of renewed tensions and clashes. Given their will for autonomy, both Puntland and Somaliland are under increasing pressure of Al-Shabaab militias. Moreover, on-going local disputes between the two regions have become more prominent, a situation which is in many ways a result and manifestation of the Somalia crisis.

Another major difference between South and northern Somalia is the role played by traditional authorities in the establishment of local mechanisms of stabilization. In contrast with what happened in the South, northern traditional authorities were instrumental in establishing peace in the area, through intense negotiation processes with local militias. Traditional authorities also fill in for absent or weak state institutions, and are recognized as legitimate interlocutors by the NGOs operating in the area, and even by some international organizations. The Diaspora has played a prominent role in the development of both regions through direct family support or private investments in infrastructure, while getting more and more involved in the political process, either by supporting peace initiatives, fueling local conflicts, or participating to the government. Despite some weaknesses, both Somaliland and Puntland have so far managed to reach a certain level of political and social equilibrium.

This balance has been recently come under strain due to the growing contestation between Puntland and Somaliland over the Sool, Sanaag and 'Ayn territories. This border dispute did not pose any real problems as long as Puntland and Somaliland did not decide to enforce their claims on the area. This changed in the early 2000s and the conflict has been escalating since then. The dispute fuels antagonisms between Isaaq and Darood clans, as well as between Somaliland and the TFG. The previous president of the TFG was a Darood from Puntland. The Darood, in stark contrast with the Isaaq from Somaliland who strongly support secession, are directly interested in the re-establishment of a strong unified Somalia. The Somaliland government has consequently been wary of the TFG, as the former realized that international support for the

TFG undermined its chances of gaining recognition. It represents a great source of potential instability and reinforces the fear that the conflict in the South might spread up North.

Regional dimensions of the conflict

The regional dimensions of the ongoing crisis in Somalia are of capital importance to understand the recent dynamics of the conflict. In different ways and degrees, most of neighboring countries are implicated: Ethiopia and Eritrea are the two major regional actors in the Somalia crisis. Kenya, Djibouti, Uganda and Sudan, at least through the IGAD sponsored dialogue process, are playing a certain role.

Ethiopia and Somalia share a long-standing history of political and territorial disputes, which has led to several direct military confrontations over the last decades. The uprising of the SCIC in 2006 aggravated the tensions between the two countries, while undermining the already tiny legitimacy of the TFG, perceived as too close to the Ethiopians. In response to this threat, the TFG President called the Ethiopian forces to intervene in Somalia, to back up the TFG against the SCIC. The Ethiopian military intervention obtained wide international support, although it accelerated the spread of the conflict throughout southern Somalia. Ethiopia retreated its troops in January 2009 but is still keeping a close eye on the situation, and keeps being wary about the emergence of any hostile regime in southern. While recognizing the legitimacy of Ethiopian concerns, its role in fueling the crisis has been recently questioned. The role of Eritrea, another longstanding actor of the Ethiopia-Somalia conflicts is also considered to have been very disturbing for the last two years. Eritrea has been providing support to Somali armed groups.

Kenya has played a more prominent role since 2005: increasingly, Nairobi has taken a more interventionist approach towards Somalia. The Somalia crisis could have direct consequences for Kenya, because the country hosts an important Somali community, in addition to hundred of thousands of refugees since the beginning of hostilities. Kenya debated the possibility of an intervention in Somalia, but lacks military capacity to do so and is ambivalent in responding to US pressures. Moreover, since the 2007 contested elections in the country, the domestic political situation constitute an important brake for any Kenyan intervention in the region.

International interventions in Somalia

Since 2004, the international community has been trying to hold a minimum legal framework in supporting and assisting the TFG, considered as the best option to fix the Somalia crisis. The volatile situation quickly deteriorated in 2006 with the intervention of Ethiopian troops to proper the TFG in Baidoa (Baydhabo) against the ICU. The escalation of conflict led to a polarization of all parties, inside and outside Somalia. On the one hand, external intervention and support of the TFG became a growing factor of dissent among the various factions in Somalia. On the other

hand, international actors proved to be primarily concerned with security issues, including terrorism and counterterrorism, at the expense of a more comprehensive approach of the crisis. The idea of transition was lost, as international actors failed at drawing into the transition process the leaders of the principal Islamist groups.

After numerous failed peacemaking processes (mostly dealing with local or regional conflicts within Somalia), the international community pushed for another attempt at a negotiated peace settlement for Somalia in June 2008. The UN-sponsored Djibouti process gained support of major external actors within the region and outside, including Ethiopia and the US, enhancing its chances of success. In particular, the withdrawal of Ethiopia in January 2009 and the resignation of the TFG President Abdullaahi Yuusuf created more favorable conditions for moving the process forward. However, the Djibouti process still faces important uncertainties and challenges, and suffers from a lack of coordination of the various international peacemaking initiatives in Somalia.

Although the Djibouti process represents a good starting point for enlarging the consensus among the warring parties, some mistakes have been made in its implementation. The DPA is an agreement between two weak parts, the TFG and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS), who both faced strong internal divisions. Moreover, the DPA did not include a section large enough of the Islamic opposition. Considering the critical regional dimensions of the Somali conflict, an international strategy should come up in order to address the security concerns of regional actors, notably Ethiopia. The process eventually faces considerable difficulties in enhancing the TFG capacities and legitimacy over the Somalia territory, while proving unable to halt the radicalization of the armed insurgencies. Being unable or unwilling to foster the dialogue between the “moderate” (as long as this term can be clearly defined) elements of these groups and the TFG, international actors have yet lost the chance to counter the influence of the armed insurgencies hard-liners on the whole process. It becomes urgent to find new ways to foster and enlarge political dialogue to every possible space, which supposes to implement new instruments of negotiation and mediation such as a panel of wises, and/or African representatives. The key to success relies on the combination of various international and regional efforts.

The African Union

The involvement of the AU in the resolution of the Somalia crises has taken to a new level with the creation of AMISOM in January 2007. Succeeding the IGAD peace support mission, AMISOM was mandated by the AU to:

- Support the transitional government structure and assist the TFG to engage in dialogue and reconciliation
- Implement a national security plan

- Train the Somali forces
- Assist in the creation of a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The mission has been facing growing difficulties. Its mandate is widely considered as being fuzzy and inadequate; AMISOM lacks capacities in terms of both troops and equipments, since few African countries have yet agreed to commit troops to the mission. Its record in supporting the TFG remains uneven, as the government is still divided over the question of including other opposition groups into the transition process.

As for other actors, AMISOM should foster the dialogue with other groups inside Somalia through an approach that would include clan elders and religious leaders. In other words, the AU should aim at developing non-military alternatives for Somalia, in advocating for a political solution that would engage all the components. This perspective might however clash with the recent development of the AMISOM mission, which has been confronting Shabaab militias to help the TFG regain control over the Somalia capital city. While doing so, it runs the risk of getting directly involved into the Somalia conflict, further aggravating the political and security crisis.

The European Union

The EU is the biggest donors in Somalia, through cooperation and development aid policies. AMISOM has also benefited from the substantial support of the African Peace Facility fund. In Somalia, the EU seeks to coordinate its action with the African Union and the UN. However, it still lacks a comprehensive strategy towards the region.

The European Council has agreed in January 2010 to set up a military mission to contribute to the training of Somali security forces, as part of the EU support of the TFG and of the stabilization process. The EU mission intends to address the security challenges of Somalia in helping the TFG to guarantee the security in Mogadishu and to gain control of part of the territory. The TFG's authority largely depends on its ability to provide stipends to troops, a task that has proven so far challenging. Besides, the TFG can not rely on a unified army, as its police and armed forces are essentially independent paramilitary actors who more than often resist any government control. Given this particular context, the EU decided to assist the TFG in the building and training of its army.

Consistent with its coordination efforts with other actors, the EU chose to join an ongoing Ugandan training mission. The mission has two sides: first, it will improve the Ugandan capacity to train soldiers; second, it will provide specialized training, mainly in counterterrorism, to 2000 soldiers. The mission will also focus on fostering social cohesion among the trainees, in order to give them a sense of loyalty to the TFG. From a military perspective, the mission does not pose any major difficulties. Things get more complicated on the political level, because the EUTM is part of a wider international strategy towards Somalia, that includes actors such as the AU,

AMISOM, the UN and the US, notwithstanding Uganda as the host country for the mission, and as one of the main troops contributor to AMISOM. Coordination and cooperation between them proved so far to be one of the most salient challenges for the EUTM. Moreover, in other part of the world, such as in Afghanistan or DRC, this kind of military training program has proven to be rather ineffective. It focused once more on a blinkered military perspective to solve the crisis although a political solution is needed.

Another difficulty for the EU derives from the contrast between its major role as donor, and its lack of political leadership on the ground. In contrast with other players, such as the US, the Arab league and so forth, the EU does not dispose of a special representative in the region. This contradiction might on the long run jeopardize EU efforts towards peace and stabilization in Somalia.

Prospects for the future and suggestions

With regard to the current situation in Somalia, several recommendations were presented:

- Recognize the fact that the TFG might not be the best channel for reconciliation. This in turn supposes to change the parameters of international actors, for whom TFG has long been considered as the only credible option. This does not mean that the international community should stop supporting the TFG; a more comprehensive approach seems however necessary that would include as many actors as possible in the reconciliation and transition process. The peace process can simply not ignore the two armed groups that control almost 80% of the south of the country. Every possible way to restart a dialogue should be explored. Any attempt to solve the Somalia crises should be therefore based on a realistic, and not ideological, assessment of the situation. In particular, close attention should be paid to the internal divisions of the armed Islamic groups in order to draw more moderate elements into the transition process.
- Create a shift in the security centered approach: the focus on terrorism and counterterrorism is considered to be counterproductive. Non-military and non-security alternatives should be taken in order to address the root causes of the Somalia crisis. Non-military alternatives and instruments should be looked for: a more integrated and bottom-up approach is needed.
- Recognize the existence of critical regional dimensions to the Somali conflict, which will imply that no solution can be found without the involvement of Ethiopia. Although Ethiopia's concerns are widely acknowledged, some underlined the fact that the way they are addressed by Addis-Ababa looks very debatable and counterproductive for the stabilization of the whole region.

- The focus should be on all the regions of Somalia: more attention should be paid to the northern territories of Somaliland and Puntland. Support towards these regions, not limited to security sectors, should be increased or at least kept at the same level. The international community could for instance send positive signs to Somaliland for holding the elections. The Diaspora initiatives to peace and infrastructure building should be complemented through EU or bilateral support program. Both Puntland and Somaliland should eventually be supported in their fight towards al-Shabaab infiltration.
- The EU should play a more prominent political role in the region, by appointing a special representative for the Horn of Africa. It could therefore pursue efforts to engage international and regional partners in the search for a common solution for the Somalia crisis.