

BY JOSEPH SIEGLE AND ZACH BAXTER

Steps Toward Reconstruction in Somalia

On December 28, 2006, Ethiopian troops entered Mogadishu in support of Somalia's internationally backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG), routing the forces of the Council of Somali Islamic Courts and ending the Courts' rapid rise to power in much of central and southern Somalia. Many international and Somali observers hoped this victory would finally put Somalia on a sustainable path of reconstruction. One year later, it is evident that this was a vain hope. Nationalist resentment of an occupying power, the perceived illegitimacy and poor capacity of the TFG, and the failure to build an inclusive coalition of clan interests in the transitional governing structure have alienated much of the Somali population and spawned a lethal and expanding insurgency. In turn, heavy-handed reprisals by the Ethiopians have fueled support for the insurgency and re-empowered violent extremists whose influence was on the wane. Fighting in and around Mogadishu has led to a grave humanitarian crisis, with a million Somalis displaced and nearly 2 million in need of emergency assistance.

As Ethiopia finds itself increasingly bogged down in insurgency, its incentives to withdraw will increase. This leaves the TFG in a precarious security position and threatens the return to power of Islamic extremists. Given its strategic location and the attractiveness that weak states with ungoverned territories present to terrorist groups, Somalia could yet become an *al-Qaeda* haven. Somalia's fragility also heightens its vulnerability to hosting a subregional proxy war between Ethiopia and its arch enemy, Eritrea.

While Somalia's seemingly perpetual crisis precludes optimism, the situation is not hopeless. The appoint-

ment of Nur Adde Hassan Hussein as Prime Minister (effective January 2008) is a step toward creating an inclusive regime. A political outsider from the Habr Gedir clan, Nur Adde was chairman of the Somali Red Crescent society, a respected aid organization, which enhances his legitimacy in the eyes of many Somalis and makes him a credible partner for the international community. Given Somalia's long tenure as a failed state, taking advantage of this opening and establishing a stable, self-governing, and non-threatening Somalia will require addressing fundamental state-building challenges, discussed below.

THE CLAN SYSTEM AND THE SOMALI STATE

Somalia's clan structure is a source of both cohesion and fragmentation. The intricate relationships between sub-clans help regulate all social interactions. Yet they also amplify violence, since any attack on an individual is an attack on his group. The clan system, moreover, reinforces a zero-sum vision of politics, accentuating often violent competition and discouraging compromise.

Compounding the challenge of the Somali clan structure is its interaction with the Somali state. The state has been the fulcrum of power and wealth in Somali society since independence in 1960, so clan control of state institutions has meant control over various lucrative activities. The desire to control the state and its riches was so strong that even after the collapse of the despised Mohammed Siad Barré regime in 1990–1991, rebel factions and clans battled to fill the dominant role rather than establish an effective instrument of governance and administration. This view of the "state as prize" continues to undermine reconstruction efforts.

This article is a synthesis of a longer paper, "Somalia: Reinventing a Fractured State," by Joseph Siegle based on initial contributions by Matt Bryden, Victor Tanner, Kirkpatrick Day, and Ken Menkhaus.



NEW FORMS OF GOVERNANCE

Behind the impression of anarchy, gradual changes in Somalia's governance have emerged. Somaliland has been autonomous and stable since 1991. Puntland followed suit in 1998. In southern and central Somalia,

starting in the late 1990s, various local groups managed to create islands of relative calm secure enough to support business and basic social services, though often in privatized form. Islamic courts also emerged as an effective way of administering justice and as a vehicle for inter-clan relations. In the words of Somalia expert Ken Menkhaus: "Though Somalia is without government, it is not without governance."

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Parallel to these "ground-up" changes, protracted negotiations in Nairobi from 2002 to 2004—under the auspices of the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development—led to the creation of a new national governance structure, the TFG. Politically and militarily weak, the TFG was largely confined to Nairobi, and then the central Somalia town of Baidoa, until it entered Mogadishu in the wake of Ethiopian armor in 2006.

POLITICAL ISLAM AND THE ISLAMIC COURTS

Traditionally, Somalis have embraced moderate strains of Sufi Islam. However, the prolonged lawlessness and inter-clan violence, the growing Salafi extremist influence and money from Saudi Arabia, and the ultra-conservative philosophies adopted by Somali diasporas in the Gulf have energized Islamic radicalism in Somalia. Despite being in the minority, forceful, well-organized, hard-core Salafi-jihadi elements have emerged as the most influential voices in Somalia's modern Islamist movement. (Groups affiliated with *al-Qaeda*, largely made up of foreigners, are more focused on using Somalia's open spaces—borders, coastlines, and unoccupied land—as a base for training and operations elsewhere in the Horn and East Africa.)

In an effort to create a functional administration in southern and central Somalia, a heterogeneous group of traditional Somali Islamists, militant hard-liners, and local clan elements formed a loose coalition of Islamic courts in the 1990s. Islamic entities rooted in charities and local *shari'a* courts, many underwritten by local businessmen, were also represented. In 2004, the courts were federated as the Council of Somali Islamic Courts, developing a close relationship with Hawiye, the dominant clan in Mogadishu. This indigenous institutional structure conferred legitimacy on the Courts' administration and generated a degree of stability not evident in Somalia since the late 1980s. Over the following two years, by building on existing networks of clan-based authority and collective security, the sway of the Courts grew in other areas of southern and central Somalia.

Although the Courts reflected the many different strains of Somali political Islam, extremist elements gradually began to exert more control. The *Shabab* (Arabic for 'youth'), the elite militia of Islamic hard-liners, began to dominate the Courts' decisions, putting the Courts on a collision course with the TFG (dominated by the Daarood clan) and their Ethiopian supporters. In late 2006, the Courts' leaders made increasingly provocative declarations, while the TFG began hosting increasing numbers of Ethiopian troops in a direct threat to the Courts' rule. With U.S. support, the Ethiopians took Mogadishu in late 2006 and the rule of the Courts collapsed.

A GROWING INSURGENCY

The Courts' decision to fight the Ethiopian army in open terrain resulted in the deaths of thousands of Somali youth, dissolving any support the Courts enjoyed among the broader Somali society. Recognizing the risk of a prolonged occupation, Ethiopian president Meles Zenawi vowed to quickly withdraw Ethiopian forces. A year later, however, Ethiopian troops remain dominant on the ground. The African Union mandated a peacekeeping force of 7,600 troops in January 2007 that would allow for the departure of the Ethiopians without creating a security vacuum, but as of early 2008, only 2,450 Ugandan and Burundian troops have been deployed, and their ability to control fighting is limited.

After seeking a negotiated settlement with the Hawiye leaders of Mogadishu, the Ethiopians moved against them in April 2007—using heavy artillery that left hundreds dead—despite the fact that the Hawiye had started a campaign against salafi militants, including *al-Qaeda* cells. With the defeat of the Hawiye forces, the conflict evolved into an urban insurgency with regular attacks on Ethiopian forces.

The presence of Ethiopian forces has created such local resentment that Islamist fighters, for whom waning popular support had been a main cause of their collapse, are now tolerated and even protected in Mogadishu. Joining them are clan militias that have now emerged as the mainstay of the anti-TFG, anti-Ethiopian resistance. In September 2007, in response to a TFG-sponsored reconciliation conference, opposition leaders created the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia, an Eritrean-backed group that has pledged continued resistance to the TFG and Ethiopian troops. The insurgency has now spread beyond Mogadishu. Insecurity reigns in most of south and central Somalia and factional leaders and warlords whose influence had declined in recent years are now re-empowered.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

The TFG faces many challenges. Its narrow clan base is seen by many Somalis as a vehicle for Daarood interests. As a result, the TFG is mistrusted by other clans, especially the Hawiye. Adding to this mistrust is the view that the TFG is the puppet of Ethiopia, itself seen as a U.S. proxy in the war on terror. Thus, the rallying cry of nationalist and religious opposition to the TFG compounds clan opposition. Moreover, until the appointment of Nur Adde Hassan Hussein as Prime Minister, the TFG has shown little deftness for building a stable political coalition. It had failed to embrace local structures that improved security and delivered basic services in many parts of south-central Somalia. Instead, the TFG adopted a “winner-takes-all” approach to governance, bypassing local entities and creating new, top-down structures that fostered resentment. The TFG is also widely perceived as uncommitted to the benchmarks mandated by the original transitional charter of 2004. This has persuaded many Somalis that the TFG is not, in fact, a transitional authority but intends to rule as the sovereign government of Somalia.

Recent moves toward reconciliation led by the new Prime Minister—releasing Hawiye clan leaders, meeting with opposition leaders backed by Eritrea, and emphasizing the technical credentials of ministers—are encouraging signs of a more inclusive governance style. Yet Somalia remains a barely recognizable state caught up in a tangled culture of violence, stunted norms of reconciliation, severe deprivation, exclusive clan-based loyalties, a winner-takes-all and predatory attitude toward governance, fractured social capital, growing Islamic extremism, proxy competition by external actors, and exploitation by international terrorists. The violence and anarchy that have typified Somalia, accordingly, are much more a symptom than a cause of the country’s troubles. In turn, progress in Somalia will be incremental

and will entail addressing immediate concerns within a framework of building functional, encompassing state institutions. We offer the following priorities to move Somalia onto a path of reconstruction.

Focus on the Transition Mandate. Considerable resistance to the TFG stems from its claim to be the official government rather than a transitional authority. In the interest of stability, the TFG must demonstrate a commitment to its transitional mandate of conducting a census, drafting a constitution, and preparing a referendum on the constitution. The TFG can also reduce tensions by publicly affirming that the TFG mandate expires in February 2009 and that extending this mandate will require authorization by a representative forum of Somali interests. The international community should make its support contingent on progress in the transition agenda.

Build on Local Social Networks. Given the structure of Somali society, the quest for reconciliation and legitimacy must be waged and won locally. Local clans, the Hawiye especially, developed some ability for self-administration and self-policing under the rule of the Islamic Courts, which were able to provide security and some basic administrative functions, often working through local Hawiye elements. The TFG should recognize the potential effectiveness of local social networks and work with them. International incentives to encourage dialogue between the TFG and local structures would foster trust and stability.

IN THE INTEREST OF STABILITY, THE TFG MUST DEMONSTRATE A COMMITMENT TO ITS TRANSITIONAL MANDATE.

Augment and Coordinate the Delivery of Social Services. In the prolonged absence of effective government, private companies, coalitions of businessmen, and Islamic charities have gained credibility by delivering municipal services. Instead of viewing these groups as a threat, the TFG could earn legitimacy for improving services by coordinating these groups, linking them to a broader reconstruction strategy, and ensuring coverage and quality of service is maximized across jurisdictions.

Invest in the Somali Economy. As the vast majority of Somalis earn their livelihoods from the rural sector, international actors can contribute to stability through initiatives such as introducing improved and drought-resistant seed, supporting farmer and pastoralist trainings, enabling farmer extension networks, providing mobile veterinary services, and promoting access to market price information. Donor support for expanding access to financial services would also be a relatively low-cost, low-risk mechanism for encouraging stability

and development. Possible interventions include sponsoring microfinance institutions, establishing reliable electronic bank transfer bureaus, promoting financial literacy, and strengthening capacity for Somalia's informal financial bodies.

Target Youth. Civil strife over the past two decades has fostered a culture of aggression and a reliance on violence to resolve differences, greatly limiting opportunities for education and skills development among Somalia's youth. Salafi-sponsored Islamic schools have been eager to fill this gap, inculcating the next generation of Somalis with their ideology. Expanding job and education opportunities for Somali youth is essential in countering this trend. Youth-oriented jobs programs, technical skills trainings, and formal schooling could be started in more stable areas, then scaled up as resources and opportunities allow.

Strengthen the Security Sector. In coordination with the TFG and clan leaders, the United Nations (UN) should help to create an inclusive process for recruiting police, army, and justice sector personnel. Establishing a unified, effective, and disciplined state security force capable of establishing a monopoly on armed violence as a means of maintaining stability should be a central feature of Somalia's state-building. Replacing Ethiopian troops with a UN force will create a security buffer to facilitate this process.

Begin Transforming Political Norms. Somalia's "winner-takes-all" politics lead those in power to believe they have the right to rule absolutely. With five major clans competing for dominance, this dynamic is clearly an unstable one. Principles of shared power, compromise, checks and balances, accountability, and minority rights are unfamiliar concepts for most in Somali politics. Donors should invest in a sustained education campaign to expose the Somali political class and general public to these governance values, and to modify expectations among competing groups. Such an initiative would dovetail with the constitution-writing and referendum process included in the TFG's transition mandate.

Gain Popular Support for Counter-Terrorism. Given other pressing security problems, counter-terrorism is not a top priority for most Somalis. By recognizing this reality, international actors with legitimate terrorism concerns in Somalia, especially the United States, can reorient their efforts within Somalia's broader security context. Ordinary Somalis must see Western engagement as helpful in addressing Somalis' security concerns, which will entail promoting stability, strengthening government legitimacy, and providing services. Pursuing terrorist objectives outside of this broader context risks alienating the general population and triggering a nationalist backlash that will support and protect jihadists.

CONCLUSION

For Somalia to cease being a failed state and achieve sustained stability largely depends on the TFG adopting a governance style that breaks from Somalia's well-established dominant party political norms. Yet, for the most part, the TFG has resisted a more inclusive approach and governs as though it is a popularly elected government with a mandate to pursue its own rather than a transitional agenda. To effect a change in course, the TFG's international backers must reiterate that their support is contingent on the TFG pursuing its transition mandate and adopting a more collaborative style. These backers would thereby signal their commitment to Somalia's long-term stability and, by so doing, deny Islamic terrorists the haven they seek in the Horn of Africa.

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