

# Peace in Somalia and Neighboring Regions: A Distant Prospect

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## Overview

Somalia is unstable and without a functional government and in spite of recent positive signs on peace talks, a violent Islamist force threatens to continue wage a destructive war. The military defeat of the Union of Islamic Courts/UIC/ in December 2006 was not the end of the war in Somalia. The Islamic Courts and the *al-Shabab* have recovered within a year of a massive Ethiopian military assault. The Transitional Federal Government/TFG/ lacks competence, leadership, morale and support to lead the battle hardened Somalia out of its current mayhem. There is little likelihood that Somalia's failed transitional institutions can be made to function, much less mesh with one another, in the foreseeable future. That the insurgents are returning in force 14 months after their military defeat is testimony enough that Ethiopian strategy so far been less successful. Indeed, the battle lines, for the fate of the TFG, are being drawn. The myriad of actors with in the opposition alliance i.e. the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia/ARS/, notably the Courts Union have been gaining recruits, overrunning towns and becoming bolder. The military assault, the policy of marginalization and propagandawar against their members seems only to have enhanced their standing both internally and externally. They also overcome orchestrated international diplomatic isolation.

Meanwhile, as the battle over who would hold political power in Somalia is reaching a climax, the struggle over what that battle meant has yet to begin. A major problem of particularly but not exclusively of Somalia is that all political groupings are weak and divided. None of the Somali parties and political/armed groups has presented a political program and the capacity to stabilize Somalia and create a functional government. The disparity between what it was before Ethiopian intervention and what it has become now is increasingly and breathtakingly blurred. Events unfolding the past seem to be the future for Somalia. When the Ethiopian forces walked into Somalia, they were hardly met with resistance and took not even a week to get to Mogadishu, the fierce military resistance of the opposition was not expected. However, Ethiopian military intervention had its own downside. Ethiopia may not have exaggerated the threats but it might have underestimated the risks. Probably Ethiopia had a winning military strategy, but lacked a workable political strategy. Neither part of this strategy would have won such a war; in combination they may have proved triumphant. Clearly, the war in Somalia has become a costly trap from which Ethiopia should extricate itself soon.

With that in mind this paper will endeavor to place the recent war in Somalia in the national context, explain its critical regional dimensions, provide an overview of its mutation over the recent years, consider the principal actors, provide some background to the negotiations between the TFG and ARS, and end with a consideration of the peace agreement and some projections on the future.

## Violence and Political fragmentation in Somalia

The conflict in Somalia is multi-layered. The conflict among clan militias, warlordism, the absence of a state, the mushrooming of criminal networks, the recent military and political conflict between the Islamic UIC and the TFG, and currently the TFG allied with Ethiopian forces against the ARS<sup>1</sup>, a patchwork of *Islamist*, nationalist, clan forces. The conflict is much more than a contest over ideological and political differences. It is not only about "power": how to acquire it, how to use it. As in much of the sub-region, conflict in Somalia is often driven and perpetuated by marginalization of peoples and regions, by lack of the rule of law, and by competition for access to land, water and resources. These problems are often exacerbated by the presence of weak, fragile, and unstable political regimes and institutions, and by growing inequality between people and communities. This being the case, by any reasonable standard of state building, Somalia appears as the biggest failure.<sup>2</sup> In many ways the conflict in Somalia is related to the death of the state. Beyond Somalia, a main factor in the Somali crisis is the military and political conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The absence of a legitimate government in Somalia facilitates this proxy war.

The UICs unexpected collapse in December 2006 has been partially misunderstood by the TFG, Ethiopia, to some degree the US, and by the media and among observers. This has negatively impacted on the roles and motives of the main players thereafter. The entry of TFG/Ethiopian forces to Mogadishu was followed by an illusory lull in an inevitable confrontation. Shortly after the end of Ethiopian military offensive a collation of resistance movement known as *al Muqawamah* or resistance began launching a series of attacks against the TFG/Ethiopian forces and civilians.<sup>3</sup> The Mogadishu insurgency draws most support from Islamic Courts loyalists, clan fighters, and 'nationalists' largely from the Diaspora and anarchy businessmen. At the beginning of the war the Ethiopian military pursues what could be termed as a "policy of conciliation" toward the enemy forces and their supporters: defeat the armed insurrection but seek to win the sympathies of civilians back to the TFG. However, the insurgents deliberately changed the course of the war with huge humanitarian and political implications, by continuously launching attacks in densely populated areas.<sup>4</sup> Insurgent attacks on government forces targeting residential quarters became the major instrument of the war causing mass displacement, exodus and large-scale suffering.

The insurgents have sworn to wage an ugly war until they force Ethiopian troops out of Somalia; so far, they have only ensured that the whole enterprise is a bloody and costly affair.<sup>5</sup> Ethiopia's intent on taming Mogadishu has faced a formidable challenge. The hard war strategy is not pretty; nor effective. Inevitably, the consequences of a bitter entrenched warfare in a hostile environment are adversely affecting the political standing of Ethiopia in Somalia. Meanwhile, despite massive firepower, the TFG/Ethiopian troops have yet to make any significant improvement on the ground. Roughly estimated, over 65 per cent of southern strategic cities and some parts of central Somalia have been recently recaptured by the opposition forces.<sup>6</sup> Insurgents have already got control of several regions in Somalia particularly the Middle Shebelle, parts of Lower Juba and Hiraan.

Kismayo, the second largest town in Somalia is in the control of allied militias independent of the TFG, increasingly tilting towards some kind of understanding with the anti-TFG groups. There are no TFG/Ethiopian forces present in Kismayo and the Juba regions as a whole, although clan militias there officially claim they are part of the government, many of them are uncertain

about their loyalty.<sup>7</sup> There is now a clear danger that Somalia could become, in fact, the nightmarish center of criminality and terrorism that many observers have previously asserted were the justification for launching the war. The Transitional Federal Authority still remains ineffective, dysfunctional by any standard. The military option is not working. A political option needs to be launched in which the loose network of opposition groups; the ARS is urged to be the main player. However, the group which calls itself the *al-shabab* is now intensively trying to transform the civil war through assassinations of what they call “collaborators” and aid workers. This is the first time in 17 years of continuous conflict that Somali rebels have deliberately targeted civilians and aid workers, women and children. This has aggravated the already precarious humanitarian situation. This coupled with the on-going chronic draught-attributed destitution of millions of agro-pastoralists in Somalia, Ethiopia's eastern Somalia Regional State and southern Borana Zone, and Eastern and Northeastern Kenya, is a major blow to human security in Somalia and adjacent regions.<sup>8</sup>

There is now a new political and security vacuum across much of southern Somalia, which the ineffectual TFG is unable to fill. Infact it is the weakness of the TFG that allowed the *shabab* and Islamic Court's militia to snatch survival from the jaws of defeat. Fighting and violence has spread to once-peaceful pockets of territory, and the number of attacks and assassinations in major towns, including Mogadishu is increasing each passing day. The TFG is not designed to deal with this problem. The TFG lacks the necessary capacity and a coherent strategy for meeting its goals, if at all it has one, in Somalia. It has been able to survive in Mogadishu, but notwithstanding all rounded support from Ethiopia, the number of Somali units capable of carrying out operations without direct Ethiopian military assistance continued to hover around 10 to 20 percent.<sup>9</sup> The TFG army is not yet fully trained nor sufficiently recruited and the trained police force is not strong enough for the duties ahead. Training is not all; training and a good salary may be better, but ultimately motivation is essential, and the fear of being killed or wounded by insurgents and only tepidly supported by the population may well cause newly trained police and troops fade away, as many have already done.<sup>10</sup> The hope that Somali government security forces can be recruited and trained effectively so far has turned out to be illusory. Ethiopia have spent too much and too long being compromised by the TFG.

### **The Somali Impasse**

As an actual political force, the T.F.G. had no resources except for international recognition, which placed it in a posture of resentful dependency. Corruption is rampant, there is little trust and confidence among the TFG officials, and the institutions are hollow and couldn't deliver. The political mood in Mogadishu has darkened, and the approval of the top leadership of the TFG is plummeting. Many Somalis complain about the TFG's reluctance or inability to confront the warlords.<sup>11</sup> Others express disgruntlement over the resultant humanitarian crisis. Aid officials say Somalia may be headed toward another famine, with nearly three million people dependent on emergency food aid, 1.5 million displaced, and aid workers being killed.<sup>12</sup> This is manifested in the ever-brewing insurgency and the TFG's dismal performance over the last year and half.

TFGs attempt to impose a victor's peace is not and could not be successful under any circumstances. It is imperative that the TFG talks to the other side of the Somali conflict. There is a growing awareness of the potential of the insurgency to recover and the damage done to Somalia by both sides of the conflict. Infact, the opposition Alliance remains one of Somalia's major political players. Probably, the specter of defeat could shape the thinking of protagonists in

both camps in telling ways. Hopefully, that is what seems happening in Somalia. With the help of the United Nations envoy in Somalia Ahmadou Ould Abdullah, the moderate factions in both the TFG and the ARS had signed the first phase of arduous and ambitious peace agreement in Djibouti on the 9th of June 2008. After follow up discussions it was agreed that the Joint Security Committee (Article 8) and the High Level Committee (Article 9) from both sides also met in Djibouti from 16 – 18 August and reiterated their commitment to stay in the peace process<sup>13</sup>

Ethiopia helped to rejuvenate the TFG- whose five-year term is about to end without any tangible accomplishments-from a near oblivion situation. The mandate of the current administration runs out in two years and according to the constitution, a new election is planned to be held at the end of the term.<sup>14</sup> Without rapid move toward broader political settlement, the Transitional Federal Government risks failure and subsequent fragmenting along clan lines. The TFG does not have the luxury of wasting more precious time. Things can go wrong very fast. It should end bickering and get on with the task such as the peace process. Derailing the Djibouti peace process---arguably the only available hope for peace in Somalia is not an option. Paradoxically, the division within the TFG is to some extent related to the Djibouti peace processes and the issue of reaching out to the restive population of Mogadishu.<sup>15</sup> The tragedy of Somalia is that the opposition camp is also divided and weak.

While the Islamist insurgents may share the same short-term goal of defeating Ethiopia and bringing down the interim government, discussions with more Somalis reveal the insurgency is actually being waged by two, sometimes three, distinct groups - fervent nationalists loyal to the Islamic Courts Union on one side, clan forces and religious zealots belonging to the home-grown, ultra-radical *shabab* group on the other.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, UIC fighters, as opposed to the *shabab*, are largely perceived as fighting for the Somali people while the clan militias are perceived to be defending the interest of their respective clans. Many Somalis think that the UIC insurgents have far more popular support<sup>17</sup>, and receive generous funding from the local business community, members of the Somali Diaspora, and ordinary people fed up with a government they overwhelmingly view as being corrupt and uncaring about their plight. The different groups are allied only in one agenda; fight against Ethiopian support of the TFG. The opposition is politically and militarily fragmented so much so that I strongly doubt that the mainstream opposition has any influence on the brutal operations of the self-declared *Shabab* warriors.

Reports show that the *shabab* has been re-organized with the backing of Islamic *jihadist* groups and supporters in the Middle East and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Probably the major difference between 2006 and 2008 in Somalia is that the *al-shabab*, rather than just seizing territory, has now solidified their links with international terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, which remain elusive but well connected, and have adopted the rhetoric of global jihad against the US<sup>19</sup>. In recent months, *shabab* leaders have said the group's ultimate goal is to help Muslims worldwide create a unified Islamic state. More recently, the *shabab* has become sharply critical of the courts for being too secular and have boldly declared that it has distanced itself from the movement.<sup>20</sup> No wonder the *al shabab* leadership has rejected the ARS and its leaders as “traitors” for talking to the TFG and vowed to continue the insurgency until the Ethiopians and their TFG “puppets” are expelled from Somalia by military force. The growth of the *al-shabab* at the expense of the UIC proper (previously the core of the ARS) and the influence of individuals with links to al-Qaeda will continue to be a major stumbling block to political resolution of the Somali crisis. Equally

threatening is the split within the TFG and the possible ascendancy of the group that opposes the peace deal initiated in Djibouti. However, the list of potential spoilers in Somalia is very long.

Though an amalgam of ideological terrorism and mainstream criminal activity in one organization is a rarity, the violence in Somalia seems to have sharpened the focus on links between the two. Criminal elements often aligned with clan militias have involved in arms and money transfers to radical and terrorist elements. The *shabab* use criminal and clan networks to aid their activities. Criminal organizations on the other hand aim to create their own space to ensure immunity from interference by a strong government and law agencies hence support the insurgency. While some Islamist leaders and influential clan leaders have joined the Djibouti discussions<sup>21</sup>, other Islamist opposition leaders claim the mediation was biased and continued to demand an Ethiopian withdrawal before talks can start.<sup>22</sup>

Those who strongly objected to the still preliminary peace agreement between the TFG and the ARS are however the *shabab* and hard-line Islamist leaders, Dahir Aweys and Hassan Turk. According to these hawkish elements within the ARS, an agreement with the TFG is not practical and objectionable to the Somali and Islamic cause. It is not a coincidence that both these men strongly opposed the deal and vowed to continue fighting. Both represent the extreme and grim side of the ruthless Jihadist block in Somalia and the Horn. And both have remained central to the link between Somalia and international terrorism. In the 1990's they belonged to the most extreme wing of the Al-Ittihad, the *al-Takfir wa'l Hijira*<sup>23</sup> and later oversaw the rise and development of the *al-shabab* as moral leaders and patrons to its late leader, Adan Hashi Ayro, whose death seem to have further hardened the position of radical elements.<sup>24</sup>

Aweys and Turki played a leading role in the most defining moment of the Somali Islamist movement: the entry of Sharia Courts into military politics.<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that both leaders come out strongly against the eventual withdrawal of Ethiopian forces and their replacement by a UN peacekeeping force. Thus, the split is not about personalities, it is about principles and reflective of a larger divide emerging between the hard-line and moderate wings of Somalia's Islamist movement. No wonder, the most important result of the efforts to open dialogue with the ARS is it helps to stir a sharp demarcation between the clan leadership, nationalists and extremists with links to international terrorism. The division within the Courts movement goes back to the days of their ascendancy, long before Ethiopian military intervention. However, differences were tolerated in the shadow of Ethiopian military onslaught. Long before the recent Djibouti agreement of June 9, 2008 brokered by the UN, the alliance upper echelon was malfunctioning; the Djibouti accord has only served as the last straw. The internal division within the Courts' movement-as it became evident in the Asmara conference in September 2007 and the recent Djibouti meeting- is indicative for the current situation in Somalia.<sup>26</sup> The divisions between the two groups have become clear as early as September 2008.<sup>27</sup> Before the public fully grasped the extent of the dispute, the two camps had already started assembling members in Asmara and Djibouti respectively for a possible fragmentation of the original alliance.

The near-collapse of the ARS and the TFG in the aftermath of the preliminary peace deal in Djibouti has become a source of concern for both Ethiopia and the US.<sup>28</sup> It only dampened the prospects of peace in Somalia, a crucial issue for both countries. The *al-shabab* has become more or less independent of the political separation and constraints of the splinter groups of the ARS in Asmara and Djibouti. Any residual influence the ARS, or what is left of it, may exercise will have negligible effect on those in the ground, fighting inside Somalia against the

Ethiopian/TFG forces.<sup>29</sup> One lesson that Somalia's long political conflict teaches us is that any peace accord will be inconclusive if one opposing group is not the official member of the signatories of that agreement. Short of this, the fighting would go on, blood would be shed, suffering of the innocent Somali people would continue. The ARS should have made the necessary consultations (negotiations if required) with the militarily stronger *al-shabab* wing. That leaves, among the leading domestic players, the head of the ARS's military wing, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, as the only figure who has increased his power, although he is by no means in control of the multi-faceted armed resistance.

In one way those who favor political negotiations as opposed to military solutions to resolve the Somali crisis couldn't blame the TFG that it is unable to achieve it. Because it has become evident that an extremist core of the insurgency is not interested in the language of political dialogue. The tragedy of peace in Somalia today is that the group, which is crucial to a ceasefire and an end to violence, the *al-Shabab*, is not at all ready to talk. The combative mood of the *shabab* is partly influenced by the measures recently taken by the US. The *al-shabab* fighters together with some leaders of the UIC(now ARS), are in the US list of terrorists, and one will not expect these people to give up and surrender. Both a peaceful Somalia and their military defeat risks their capture and subsequent handover to the US government. For them therefore, continuing the war is a matter of life and death. There is less incentive for them to seek a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Somali crisis. It is not surprising that Dahir Aweys and his close associates are increasingly nihilist and paranoid by the fact that their names are on an international terror list. Alternatively, they are determined to form a system of government they can control so that their safety is guaranteed. In such a scenario it is near delusion to assume that any peace process, including the recent Djibouti peace accord, will be implemented without the Asmara wing of the ARS. The Asmara wing of the ARS should be an important component of the peace deal. The alternative is to decisively overpower them, a scenario that increasingly seems unlikely to happen in the near future.

## The Regional Impasse

Regional interests-economic, political and ideological-are played out in Somalia, relatively unhindered by a functional state. The civil war in Somalia thus increases the extent of polarization in the Horn of Africa. Although the crisis went on for almost two decades, the conflict in Somalia remained more or less manageable for Ethiopia. This has changed in late 2006 with the emergence of the Islamic Courts as a united military force. Led by figures with an Islamist and irredentist rhetoric and powerful elements with an unmistakable *jihadi* agenda, the UIC invited Ethiopian intervention.<sup>30</sup> The decision to enter Somalia was driven by more immediate considerations though: the Courts' links to transnational terrorism, support for Ethiopia rebel groups, and reliance on Eritrea. Clearly, the recent war in Somalia is the result of a reckless policy of confrontation by the Somali Islamic extremists who have taken both policies and rhetoric (such as holding their next *salat* prayers in Addis) too far to provoke a powerful neighbor.<sup>31</sup> Their reckless and out of control behavior triggered the presence of Ethiopian troops in Mogadishu today. Another consideration was the conflict with Eritrea.

Not unique, but certainly the main conflict between states in the region; the political and armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea lies at the heart of the region in geopolitical terms; and it has a poisoning effect on other conflicts, including those which are essentially unrelated to it.<sup>32</sup> Eritrea and Ethiopia are currently locked in a proxy war in Somalia. Eritrea is fully supporting, most, if not all of the rebel groups that are causing havoc in Ethiopia and Somalia. After failing to convince the rest of the world to stand by Eritrea on the "border issue", the Eritrean leader has taken it upon him to destabilize Ethiopia. To that end, he continued to sponsor a myriad of rebel groups. Already, the region is suffocating with liberation fronts, some with legitimate grievances and some others, with dubious origin and agendas. From the Sudan, to Eritrea, to Ethiopia and Somalia, the region is bursting with many armed rebel groups.<sup>33</sup> It is now clear that the region should confront the startling fact that Eritrea has fully given itself completely to the cause of being a military base to all insurgencies throughout the region.

Eritrea now is host, to a number of rebel groups, ranging from the Oromo Liberation Front/OLF/, the Ogaden National Liberation Front/ONLF/, the former Somali Union of Islamic Courts and many others, in between. Earlier this year, the Eritrean regime had increased its focus on what it considers as Ethiopia's weakest point—Somalia and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.<sup>34</sup> The conflict in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and Somalia cannot be delinked. This is not only because of the geographic proximity and ethnic affinity, the similar economic deprivation and humanitarian crisis, but also due to the religious and political nature of the conflict. Like the opposition in Somalia, the ONLF struggles to resolve the tension between the Islamist and nationalist/secular strands within the organization. The two strands have coexisted for long shaping relations with Somali insurgents in one way or the other. This coupled with the Eritrean factor have remained to be the major glue that binds the insurgency in both areas. Currently the ONLF is still caught in the military pressure from Ethiopia on the one hand and the tension between its own Islamist and secular-nationalist tendencies on the other which threatened its existence as a cohesive rebel group.<sup>35</sup>

Eritrean obsession with Ethiopian politics is such that Somalia has become a major diplomatic priority for Asmara so much so that it pulled out from the regional grouping IGAD, which exposed the festering tension between the two countries and IGAD over the management of the conflict in Somalia.<sup>36</sup> But Asmara has been at odds with IGAD since the bloc approved the

deployment of peacekeepers in Somalia to help the Ethiopia-backed Transitional Federal Government of Somalia. It is now the main backer of the extremist wing of the ARS. This is having a profound impact on the war in Somalia and the quest for a peaceful settlement of the crisis. The *Shabab* and hardline elements of the Somali opposition will not accept anything that would favor a win-win solution because their backer (Eritrea) will not satisfy anything less than humiliating its arch enemy, Ethiopia. Although Eritrea is small, weak and very poor, it is, largely due to the situation in Somalia, a major threat to its neighbors, notably Ethiopia. Through the support for the UIC militias and now the ARS, including the *Shabab* Eritrea is enabled to engage in a proxy frontline war with Ethiopian troops.

While Ethiopia and Eritrea support different factions in Mogadishu and other parts of Somalia, new questions have emerged about the future of the quasi states and autonomous administrations that emerged in Somalia after the collapse of the Siad Barre government. Although Somaliland has made remarkably successful efforts towards statehood, primarily by holding elections and providing public goods, the silence by the international community over its recognition continues to cast a pall over its future. Similarly, Puntland has struggled to project the image of a functional state, even though it is less endowed than Somaliland in terms of human capacity and economic resources. In recent months, it has become beset by socio-economic and political crisis and witnessed a deterioration of security, an unwelcome situation related to some degree to what is happening in southern Somalia and within the TFG. In addition to the uncertain relationships with Mogadishu and southern Somalia, there are new border conflicts between Somaliland and Puntland, that blended with resource and the ever changing clan alliances, have occasionally resulted into violence, underscoring the endurance of border disputes in the region.

Meanwhile, Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia in pursuit of what Ethiopia perceives as its legitimate national security interest—namely to ensure that the Transitional Federal Government defeats its adversary, the Union of Islamic Courts—has made it a major player in events shaping Somalia. Nonetheless, recent Ethiopian intervention in Somalia, as mentioned previously, suffered from three major weaknesses. Probably, these shortcomings are based on the misreading of the TFG and Somali realities. To begin with Ethiopian military intervention was not anchored in a workable and realistic political formula. In the process it tried to impose the weak TFG by force and as a consequence came to be only associated with one political force in a highly politically fragmented country. Though the TFG is widely recognized as a legitimate government internationally, as discussed earlier, its claim is highly contested internally. The TFG from its inception lacked representative legitimacy and credibility, which hampered the 'efforts' it made to extend its appeal.

Secondly, Ethiopian intervention was not anchored in a clearly articulated international support plan. Since, Ethiopia had to run against time to save the TFG from collapse and had to stop the UIC from expanding one can say there was no enough time for Ethiopia to be able to garner concrete international support for its pro-TFG military operations in Somalia. For many in the region Ethiopian intervention opened a new window of opportunity for building a sustainable peace in Somalia, but it also triggered uneasiness in the UN system<sup>37</sup>, and turned to be a divisive issue in the process of consolidating an inclusive political process in Somalia. If Sudan presented the most complex, combined peacekeeping challenges to the international community in 2007 Somalia presented and still presents the most difficult choice. The UN has always claimed that intervention in Somalia is marred by a lot of risks. With the debacle in early 1990's such an excuse was generally accepted. But the UN failed to act even when there were no risks at all, such as when the TFG was

first established in 2004 and later in early 2007 when it reached Mogadishu immediately after the military defeat of the Islamists. After 20 solid months the UN is still skeptical about Somalia. Neither the expected assistance to AMISOM nor a UN peacekeeping force is in sight.

The expectation that the UN will provide high levels of assistance to AMISOM as well as the assumption that African missions, notably in Somalia, will eventually transition to UN operations is almost disappearing.<sup>38</sup> Efforts to muster a strong African Union protection force to replace the Ethiopian forces will continue to run in to difficulties; at best it will be very slow. The stiff resistance activities in Mogadishu have also deterred the deployment of 8000 strong AMISOM troops in Somalia. The strategy of keeping AMISOM troops at bay so that the Ethiopian troops would finish off the remnant of the hard core Islamist fighters before the deployment of AMISOM soldiers take place have faced difficulties. Only a handful of Ugandan and Burundian troops have been deployed, some of them unenthusiastically.<sup>39</sup> The African Union mission is understaffed, and as the head of UPDF once said, the mission target is survival in Somalia rather than the stabilization of Somalia.<sup>40</sup> Faced with a weak government wanting to consolidate power and an opposition desperately trying to prove the situation is volatile, the United Nations Security Council is yet to come up with a definite and plausible plan of action. Looking at the failures of the very recent, in 2004 and early 2007, the likely consequences of inaction seemed obvious and far outweighed the risks of intervention.

Unable to guarantee international support, and probably hoping to get it sometime in the future Ethiopia had to act alone. Its military operation in Somalia, while necessary, was also a costly drain on its scarce resources. Another problem was evident too: the attempt to reconstruct the Somali state and stabilize the country from above, a repeatedly failed and discredited strategy. Long held view of the author of this paper is that peace building and state building in Somalia is not necessarily one and the same, and at times happen to be contradictory to each other.<sup>41</sup> The state haven't actually been around long enough to draw conclusions, however, recent experiences should inform policy makers that there is a need to push for an alternative form of government that might be better suited to Somalia's fluid, fragmented and decentralized society. The bulk of outside efforts have concentrated on standing up a strong central government, which may be anathema in a country where authority tends to be diffuse and clan-based. This has become glaringly evident due to the TFGs shortcomings. Equally mistaken was the undue emphasis given to taming Mogadishu, an obsession shared by majority Somali political players. All these factors, coupled with the division and squabbles within the TFG seem to have compromised total victory and orderly withdrawal of Ethiopia forces from Somalia.

### **Conclusion: Debunking the Myth**

Ethiopian intervention didn't have the decisive impact on the crisis in Somalia that many had expected. The continuing clan divisions and the strength of Islamists today are as much of a reflection of the civil war and the stateless situation as they are the result of Ethiopian intervention and the world's failure to help rebuild the country. Energized by Ethiopia's military machine as well as political and some external financial support, the TFG is still unable to turn some of its military successes in to organizational strength and political achievements. As the crisis in the T.F.G. deepened, the insurgency in Mogadishu led by the *jihadist* movements continue to spike, with many areas in south Somalia descending to chaos and anarchy. With a

clan-based structure dominated by clan warlords, the T.F.G. as an institution has been proved that it is not designed to resolve Somalia's intractable problems. This is something real. Its inherent problems are also real, which is exactly a major reason why Ethiopia should support negotiations with the opposition so that a more credible and functional government is established in Somalia. This will guarantee complete Ethiopian withdrawal and eventual disengagement. Indeed, a major part of the problem for Ethiopia will not be solved by new military tactics or increased military operations: it is the weakness of the Somali government.

Unless the situation is altered, Somalia risks sliding back into the anarchy and warlordism that prevailed in the 1990's. Such a reversion would have a disastrous consequence for Somalia, the stability of Ethiopia and the region and would be a profound setback for the US war on terror. One of the justifications for Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia was that it needed to prevent militant Islamists from stocking the fire of Ogaden irredentism as they did in the 1970s. Although the Ethiopian government seems to have conducted relatively successful counterinsurgency operations against what it considers as a terrorist organization, the ONLF, failure to meet the grievances in the Ogaden may recreate the instabilities that have dogged the region in the past. The gene of radicalization, chaos and mayhem may have been unleashed onto Somalia and neighboring regions as a result of the mistakes accompanying the intervention, rather than the intervention per se and can't be put back into a bottle.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, unlike Ethiopia the fight of the *shabab* and other militias against the Ethiopian army has become an ideal instrument for Eritrea to wage war against its biggest neighbor. A war that does not risk losing neither its own territory nor causing a large number of Eritrean casualties.

The TFG is doing Ethiopia a disservice by squandering the opportunity and failing to turn the support it enjoys into real capacity. Its performance to date has undermined the confidence many of its allies who have had confidence about its leaders and their ability and integrity in combating terrorism more generally. It is falling because it is inefficient, or dysfunctional, or unpopular, or all three. Its leaders are consumed by yet another round of infighting. The first step toward undoing the mistakes entails debunking the myth that The TFG could stabilize Somalia and fight against terrorists effectively. The second step would be, as is also related to Ethiopia, debunking the myth that supporting the TFG enhances regional stability and more specifically Ethiopia's national security. The third step should be debunking the myth that all major players in the Courts movement are linked to terrorism. The last point is timely because an interesting dynamics is repeating itself, like the one which took place a year and half ago in the Courts Union, within the ARS. Moderates with a Somali agenda are distancing themselves from the hardliners with a foreign and global agenda.

Almost all political and military forces in Somalia, including clan leadership, business and civil society groups are either weak or internally divided. To a large part the division within the opposition emanates from clan loyalty to ideological (Islamic) extremism. The problem starts from its composition involving disparate, contradictory and sometimes antagonistic political agendas and actors. Currently it is weak and divided and its fate hinges solely on the Ethiopian factor bereft of any common agenda for itself and devoid of an alternative exit strategy for the war torn country. It mixes political/democratic transition with *Jihad*. Rhetoric aside, this group is unable to forge a common political platform and come up with a sensible or reasonable political strategy. The imperfections of the TFG are troublingly obvious, but this is what we have in Somalia. Unlike the TFG, the opposition, particularly its radical wing, lacks even the intent to contribute for peace and state building in Somalia. The progressive fragmentation of political

forces has continued unabated. Recurring conflict within the TFG and the current political fragmentation among the opposition alliance is symptomatic of this development. This makes the prospect of peace in Somalia a distant prospect.

## **Recommendation**

There are a number of steps that should be taken and general directions that should be followed by different stakeholders, which will help resolve the Somali crisis in general. This includes crosscutting issues and specific measures that need to be taken by particular players in the Somali conflict.

As a start, the only available, if not the best, alternative is to support the peace accord just signed in Djibouti between Somali opposing sides. This accord should be expanded to its logical conclusion of unity-government between the TFG and its opposition. Engage with the traditional leadership, particularly the Hawiya clan leadership in Mogadishu. Violence will intensify unless the government reconciles with clan elders, who control as much as anyone controls, what happens in Somalia.

Both the UN and Ethiopia should have placed great emphasis on the obligation of the Somali government to achieve some benchmarks for peace and state building in Somalia. Above all Ethiopia should link its strategy on Somalia and all its support of the TFG to progress on clear benchmarks and political steps than its zeal to fight its adversaries. It is also imperative that the TFG as an institution should be made to deliver. That doing away with a dysfunctional government is more important than directly fighting with *ihadists*

Peace in Somalia requires the TFG to be reconstituted as a genuine government of national unity irrespective of the TFG's signs of willingness or its tendency to use the war on terror as an excuse not to reach out other forces or secure unlimited support from Ethiopia. Whatever amount of representation and legitimacy it may command, the TFG is a transitional entity. It should not be allowed to monopolize transitional institutions by excluding all other actors in Somalia. This will not help a peaceful political transition in Somalia. That was not the intention of creating the TFG in the first place. The Transitional Federal Institutions/TFIs/, mainly key transitional institutions such as the electoral Commission and Reconciliation Commission, including the security sector should be open to the participation of different players in Somalia.

The international community and the United Nations should walk extra mile to strengthen the moderates by working hard to facilitate timely withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia—the ARS's key demand. Failure to do so will undoubtedly embolden the militants and potentially derail the entire peace process.

Since the mid 1990's there has never been a more auspicious time for Ethiopia to establish close relations with those Somali forces who have long used the *Islamist* and nationalist card. Ethiopia should learn to engage and cooperate with those forces in Somalia that are critical to its role or those that work to constrain its influence. Such forces are not necessarily enemies of Ethiopia's national interest. In some instances, for Ethiopia, peace and national security entails learning to work with some of its enemies and coexist with political leaders with strong Islamist credentials. In a mess such as that of Somalia, it is imperative to deal with different actors and avoid the

tendency of supporting one group, however good that group is, to impose complete control in an uncontrolled space such as Somalia, which will never happen anytime soon.

Meanwhile, for the sake of stable transition Somali actors need to develop somehow grudging acceptance that they could gain a lot from, and only from orderly and phased withdrawal of Ethiopian troops.

Reducing the threat from Somali Islamists need to be linked with creating conditions conducive to constructive political dialogue in that country. One without the other is difficult to achieve, and even it is less desirable.

There is every reason to reach out to those who think Islam must play a role in the political transition in Somalia, as long as they agree on the transitional process and abide by its rules. Nonetheless, as long as the *al-shabab* fighters together with some leaders of the UIC (now ARS) are in the US list of terrorists, one will not expect these people to give up and surrender, and something needs to be done about it.

What is needed is a political strategy to combat, contest and weaken the appeal of these groups or to marginalize their violent factions. It is impossible to totally marginalize Islam from the political life of the Somalis. Islam cannot be totally excluded, it can only be moderated. The best way to do that is by opening an inclusive political process that ultimately marginalizes the extremists and accommodates the moderates. External help is always needed to blunt Islamic extremism.

The most urgent task now is, however, how to deal with the fundamental problems of Somalia, mainly the task of providing former combatants and the youth with access to livelihoods. Economic pressures are rising within the IDPs. What is required is large-scale emergency and economic aid geared towards Demilitarization, Demobilization, Reconciliation and Reintegration/DDRR/, with the last R being the biggest one. This will not totally resolve Somalia's political problems, but it will definitely enhance chances for peace all over the country and the establishment of a functional government in Somalia. That is like a great leap forward towards resolving the crisis in Somalia and the region. This will greatly reduce, if not eliminate, security risk for the region and the world at large. It is wise for the international community, mainly Western countries to become more serious about Somalia before the momentum for peace is totally lost.

Major political players in Somalia are so disorganized; disoriented and divided the focus needs to be on the peace building initiatives at the local level. State building from above is either hopeless or distant; at present the only feasible project is peace building at the local level and in the regions. After the recent experience of the TFG following this model is surely unthinkable.

There is an urgent need to spark decentralized political processes, not because that is what is possible today in Somalia but also because it is an effective mechanism to immediately undertake the urgently needed projects of reconciliation, law and order, and rehabilitation of the national infrastructure. The only option is to rebuild Somalia from the bottom up.

The fixation on Mogadishu must stop. For all practical reasons, guarding Somaliland's achievements and protecting Somalia's peace zones is equally important. The conflict has

reached a point where it is almost impossible to resolve the crisis in south Somalia without according recognition to and rewarding the achievements of the Somaliland people. To avoid yet another complication, external allies of the TFG must realise that making progress on the south depends on a clear and sensible position towards Somaliland. It seems unlikely that any real progress will be achieved in south Somalia unless the signatories of the Djibouti Accord abandon their pretension that they also represent Somaliland. Unless both sides view their role as limited to the south, then Somalia's problems will not only linger but also might worsen.

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- <sup>1</sup> The ARS was formed in September 2007 in Asmara and delegates chose Sheikh Sherif Ahmed as its new leader.
- <sup>2</sup> Annette Weber. State Building in Somalia-Challenges in a Zone of Crisis. In Hot Spot Horn of Africa revisited: Approaches to Make Sense of conflict. Lit Verlag Dr. W.Hopf Berlin 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> The Spokesman for the African Union peacekeeping mission Barigye Ba-Hoku says Islamist insurgents have been using guerrilla tactics borrowed from the insurgency in Iraq.
- <sup>4</sup> Discussions with Somalis and Ethiopians involving in the military conflict in Somalia reveal that gradually it has become clear that the TFG/Ethiopian forces couldn't change the hearts of the people of Mogadishu or south Somalia, tilting towards pursuing a hard war policy that their opponents will give up and sue for peace
- <sup>5</sup> Almost all Somalis I had discussions with say that despite the insecurity and misery of the last 16 years the people Mogadishu were not feeling the brunt of war in such a scale.
- <sup>6</sup> Discussions with Somalis from Middle Shebele and Lower Juba, Addis Ababa. July 2008. Press reports and Somali Web sites have also reported along similar lines, reports never contradicted the other side of the Somali conflict.
- <sup>7</sup> Given their recent expansion of infrastructure and military consolidation in the area, it is a matter of time before the *al-shabab*, either co-opt or defeat the clan militias in Lower Juba, including Kismayo.
- <sup>8</sup> Horn of Africa-Complex Emergency.USAID.Fact Sheet, July21, 2008.
- <sup>9</sup> Somali informants Addis Ababa. May 2008.
- <sup>10</sup> Discussions with Ethiopians and Somalis, Addis Ababa, April 2008.
- <sup>11</sup> May be it is too late too little, but the removal of Mohamed Dheere from the office of the Mogadishu mayor is characterized to be part of a strategy by the Prime Minister to create in Mogadishu and its environs a relatively peaceful environment where national reconciliation could be advanced.
- <sup>12</sup> The Financial Times. August 20,2008.
- <sup>13</sup> Communiqué by the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia, August 18,2008.Djibouti.
- <sup>14</sup> Somalia is far from achieving any of the TFG mandates: completion of the peace process; implementation of Federalism in the country; demarcation of boundaries; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); developing a viable security sector; the drafting-and passing through a national referendum- of a constitution and elections in 2009.
- <sup>15</sup> The straw that broke the T.F.G.'s back came when Nur Adde dismissed the unpopular Dheere in an attempt to gain credibility with disaffected sub-clans of the Hawiye clan family, which dominates Mogadishu.
- <sup>16</sup> Discussion with former members of UIC.
- <sup>17</sup> Somali informants: They say while the UIC fighters are very much liked, the *shabab* are very much feared, mainly due to their ruthless character.
- <sup>18</sup> The Daily Nation Newspaper,Nairobi,Kenya August 1,2008. Besides in a recent interview with the BBC, Sheikh Mukhtar Roobow, the leader of the *al-shabab* (a position previously filled by Ayro) acknowledged the presence of foreign fighters and that foreign funds boost his forces, not to mention modern firearms and equipment.
- <sup>19</sup> The presence of international *jihadists* and a network of training camps in middle and lower Juba have reportedly increased since late last year. The recent (august 25,2008) report by the Los Angeles Times which extensively cited the commander of al-shabab Mukhtar Robow seem to confirm this assertion.
- <sup>20</sup> This was repeatedly stated by the spokesman for the Islamic Courts Union insurgents in Somalia, Abdirahim Isse Adow, May 12 and June 23, 2008.
- <sup>21</sup> Ahmed Dirie, spokesman for the Hawiye Tradition and Unity Council, told reporters that the Djibouti peace initiative should not be dismissed.
- <sup>22</sup>“Links between Organized Crime and Terrorism”. The Conflict, Security & development Group Bulletin. Issue Number 14.Kings College,London.

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- <sup>23</sup> Medhane Tadesse. *Al:ittihad: Political Islam and Black Economy in Somalia. Religion, Money, Clan and the Struggle for Supremacy Over Somalia*. Mega Printers, february 2002. Addis Ababa.
- <sup>24</sup> The death of Ayro in the end of April by American strikes and putting his group in the list of terrorist organization by the US made the group more paranoid and less interested in any peace.
- <sup>25</sup> Medhane Tadesse. *Sharia Courts and Military Politics in Stateless Somalia*. In Hot Spots Horn of Africa Revisited: Approaches to Make Sense of Conflict. Transaction Publishers, LIT VERLAG, Berlin 2008.
- <sup>26</sup> Somalia's opposition alliance elects Islamist as chief. 14 September 2007. Garoweonline. <http://www.garoweonline.com>. (Access October 5 2007).
- <sup>27</sup> According to Gerard Prunier, " Armed Movements in Sudan, Chad, CAR, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia." ANALYSE 02/08. Paper Presented by Center for International Peace Operations, Berlin/Germany in february 2008, the division between the two groups are so poor that the *shabab* killed Salah Ali Saleh "Nabhan" (one of the three guys on the CIA most wanted list) in September this year because he had joined the ARS.
- <sup>28</sup> Abdullahi Yusuf, as much as he is trusted and determined to fight against the insurgency, he is however increasingly considered as a liability by Ethiopia as his ways of doing things are politically costly.
- <sup>29</sup> Following five days of consultations meeting they held in Jalaqsi town in Hiran region the Islamic courts union officials confirmed this position, declaring that they have distanced themselves from both groups on August 18, 2008.
- <sup>30</sup> Hassan Turki's bold comments on December 17, 2006, when the Islamist militia commander asserted that "after Baidoa, Addis Ababa is next," referring to the seat of power for the governments of Somalia and Ethiopia, respectively.
- <sup>31</sup> Other agendas are either non-existent or less important. Ethiopia entered Somalia only when the ICU threatened to conduct its next prayer rituals in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital.
- <sup>32</sup> Christopher Clapham, "Regional Implications of the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Dispute," in Conference on the Current Peace and Security Challenges in the Horn of Africa. Organised Jointly by CPRD and IAG, March 12-13, 2007, Addis Ababa.
- <sup>33</sup> In fact, all of a sudden, sponsoring a liberation front is becoming fashionable and is as some say the only growth industry in Eritrea.
- <sup>34</sup> Classified reports show that to achieve this goal, the Ethiopian opposition groups were moved from their bases in the Western lowlands of Eritrea to the Denakil Depression. And, in recent months arms and soldiers are being smuggled to Somalia via Djibouti.
- <sup>35</sup> Recently however tension is emerging between the two camps impacting on their relations with the hardline Islamists and the war in Somalia. The major trigger being the death of Sheikh Ibrahim who was the spiritual leader of the front, at the end of June, complicating the relations between the ONLF fighting force and the Islamic Courts Union militia, particularly the al-Shabab.
- <sup>36</sup> Statement from the Eritrean foreign Ministry. Quoted by *Peter Martell* ASMARA, April 22, 2007 (AFP)
- <sup>37</sup> Discussions with UN officials in Newyork, July 23, 2007.
- <sup>38</sup> The author had prepared a detailed analysis on the issue in a memo he wrote at the UN "the UN's Somalia Position on Trial" August 2007.
- <sup>39</sup> Amisom troops from Uganda and Burundi totaling 2,200 are already present in Somalia. Nigeria's 850 troops will make it the third country to fulfill the promise to send peacekeepers to Somalia.
- <sup>40</sup> Discussions with diplomats and military officials, Addis Ababa
- <sup>41</sup> For Ethiopia, a country which until recently remained the major proponent of the building block approach, to become a party to the project of imposing the TFG and creating the Somali state with the idea of bringing order to Somalia from the top down is just incomprehensible.
- <sup>42</sup> It is quite possible and worrying that what has haunted the imagination of Ethiopian leaders may have become even bolder now than before the war.