
Foreign Affairs – Somalia

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I know that a lot of ink has recently been dedicated to this subject in the domestic and international press. Yet, Somalia remains a country that is not well known to many Americans. Somalia attracted great attention in the Ogaden conflict with Ethiopia in 1977-78 for its impact on superpower relations. We remember Zbigniew Brzezinski's trenchant comment that the United States and the Soviet strategic arms treaty was, as he put it, "buried in the sands of the Ogaden." Americans also of course vividly recall the 1992 U.S. led humanitarian intervention and the subsequent confrontation with Mogadishu warlord Mohamed Farah Aideded after his forces killed some two dozen Pakistani peacekeepers in June 1993. The downing of two U.S. helicopters and deaths of eighteen American troops in October 1993 not only had a significant policy impact in terms of future U.S. participation in peacekeeping operations, but also left emotional scars that continue to influence American public attitudes toward Somalia.

Developments over the past eighteen months have again attracted widespread interest in Somalia: first in the rapid rise of the Islamic Courts Council and then in its even-more-rapid fall at the hands of Ethiopian forces backing those of the Somali Transitional Government. To help put these developments in context, what I would like to do tonight is outline U.S. interests in Somalia, provide some historical background, then offer an assessment of the events of the last year or so, and finally describe the U.S. government's very active policy response. To preview the conclusion, our policy is designed to seize what we see as the first real opportunity in many years to help Somalis rebuild their country and restore effective governance representative of all aspects of Somali society. Our response to this opportunity can and will be purposeful. As many of you know, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, my boss, has made two trips to the Horn of Africa since January 2007 in support of our efforts to achieve lasting stability in Somalia.

If there is one lesson she took away from her trip it is this: the Somali people are ready for peace; they are tired of war. While the Transitional Federal Government and the Transitional Federal Institutions are not yet ready to stand entirely on their own, they offer a promising vehicle forward for Somalia. And the United States is committed to supporting that effort.

Somalia's Strategic Importance

First, I will outline U.S. interests in Somalia, which of course must drive our goals and policies for that country. Somalia has been the world's clearest example of a failed state since 1991. This condition threatens our broader interest in regional stability in the Horn of Africa. The country sits at the crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa and the Near East. The overall security of the region is affected by Somalia's continued lack of internal stability. The Horn has historically been a fragile region in terms of environment, economic livelihoods and security. With the longest coastline in Africa, Somalia's lack of effective governance has contributed to offshore piracy. More broadly, its status as a failed state has undercut longer-term foreign policy interests including promotion of democracy and economic development.

Most dramatically, of course, Somalia's ungoverned spaces opened opportunities for terrorists who directly threatened U.S. persons and facilities. Al-Qaida East Africa members responsible for

the August 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam found refuge in Somalia. So did individuals responsible for the bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa, Kenya and an attempted missile attack on an Israeli airliner, both in 2002. As we will see later, the opportunities afforded terrorist-affiliated individuals increased significantly in Somalia during the period of the Islamic Courts' control.

In keeping with U.S. interests in the Horn, our goals in Somalia are to help Somalis secure their country, move forward with process of inclusive dialogue and reconciliation, and begin reconstruction. If this sounds like a massive undertaking in what has been a failed state, it is. And at this point, it is fair to ask, how did Somalia get here?

Somali History In Brief

So now, let me review some of the background to the current situation. Prior to independence in 1960, most of present-day Somalia was ruled by the Italians, with the northwest by the British. As in many African countries at the time, independence ushered in a contentious period of democratic governance that was followed by a coup. In Somalia's case, the October 1969 coup brought to power Major General Mohamed Siad Barre. Siad Barre ruled brutally and increasingly concentrated power in the hands of his Marehan clansmen. He asserted irredentist claims to territories in neighboring countries with Somali populations, notably the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Initially within the orbit of the Soviet Union, he switched to the Western camp after rival Ethiopia allied with the Soviets, who helped Ethiopia decisively win the 1977-1978 Ogaden war that I mentioned earlier in my remarks.

By the end of the 1980s, disaffected members of other clans had taken up arms against Siad Barre's government, first in the north (especially former British Somaliland) but later spreading to the central and southern regions. Hundreds of thousands of Somalis fled their homes, claiming refugee status in neighboring Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya. The Somali army disintegrated, and members rejoined their respective clan militias. Barre's effective territorial control was reduced to the immediate areas surrounding Mogadishu, as he came to be ridiculed as "the Mayor of Mogadishu."

In January 1991, armed opposition factions drove Barre out of power, resulting in the complete collapse of the central government. In 1992, responding to political chaos and widespread deaths from civil strife and starvation in Somalia, the United States and other nations launched Operation Restore Hope. Led by the Unified Task Force (UNITAF), this operation was designed to create an opening to assist Somalis suffering from the effects of dual catastrophes, one man-made and one natural. UNITAF was followed by the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). The United States played a major role in both operations until withdrawing completely in 1994. UNISOM pulled out in spring 1995, with Somalia still lacking a government.

Following the fall of Siad Barre, Somalia has largely been divided among clan-based fiefdoms, many dominated by strongmen from the region. Some regions pursued more formal structures: Northeastern Somalia (or Puntland) established a quasi-autonomous government that enjoyed relatively greater stability. Most notably, the self-declared Republic of Somaliland asserted its independence in 1991. While unrecognized by any other government, Somaliland has held elections, issued its own currency and travel documents, and sought to distance itself from insecurity prevalent in much of the rest of the country. In the capital, Mogadishu, the city was carved into neighborhoods controlled by sub-clan based warlords. In part as a result of insecurity and impunity, by the mid-1990s local Islamic courts were established by many communities to provide basic justice and some protection for the population. Over time, these courts acquired their own militia forces and effectively became the local authorities. Some leaders of some of the courts, however, had extremist tendencies and harbored individuals affiliated with al Qaeda's East Africa cell. By early 2006, Mogadishu was essentially divided into zones controlled by warlords and zones controlled by the courts. There were more than

a dozen efforts after the fall of Siad Barre to negotiate among the contenders to form a new national government. The latest of these a two-year reconciliation process led by the inter-governmental authority on development (IGAD) concluded in 2004, having formed a transitional government with the objective of organizing national elections in 2009. The components of that transitional government are known as Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) and include a transitional parliament, as well as a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) with a transitional President, Prime Minister and a cabinet. This government lacked broad legitimacy, however, particularly among key clans and sub-clans in Mogadishu that felt under-represented. This essentially brings us to the situation that existed last year.

Decisive Moments

Beginning in early 2006, there were increased clashes between the warlords, some of them grouped in a loose coalition known as the Alliance for Peace and Combat Against Terrorism, and the Islamic Courts militias known as the Union of Islamic Courts. The warlords steadily lost ground and by early June had been driven from Mogadishu. Despite issuing an initial statement calling for dialogue and peace, the Court militia quickly moved to attack and capture the city of Jowhar, where the Transitional Government's cabinet was based, and over the next three months took control of most of southern Somalia.

From the beginning, the U.S. recognized that the Courts were not monolithic, and we hoped for emergence of moderates within the Courts' leadership. At the time, the United States was encouraged by the June 22, 2006 agreement between the Somali Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) and the then-Union of Islamic Courts. The United States supported this agreement, which came to be known as the Khartoum Declaration, including the points of mutual recognition and cessation of hostilities. For a time, the Islamic Courts also appeared to have success in improving security in Mogadishu and other areas under their control.

While negotiations initially offered great promise, by late July the Islamic Courts' actions were beginning to counter the spirit and reality of dialogue and to lead to further violence. Immediately after the Khartoum Declaration, the Union of Islamic Courts re-named themselves Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) and Hassan Dahir Aweys, designated by both the United States and the United Nations as a terrorist, was elected to be the Chairman of the CIC Consultative Council. On July 19, 2006, the CIC attempted to provoke Ethiopia into a broader conflict by advancing towards the interim capital of Baidoa. In succeeding months, extremist elements within the CIC - particularly the radical al Shabaab organization, hijacked the broader Courts movement, driving the CIC towards an agenda of military expansion and aggression.

Despite international efforts to encourage dialogue between the CIC and the TFIs, the CIC chose repeatedly to violate the terms of the Khartoum Declaration by bombing the Parliament building in Baidoa on September 18, 2006 taking over the port city of Kismaayo September 24, 2006, and increased their military presence near Baidoa and Puntland. In November 2006, the Courts' leadership asserted irredentist claims to a "greater Somalia" including areas of Kenya and Ethiopia. Ethiopia, already a strong supporter of the Transitional Federal Government, provided additional military trainers and other support to the government. These were decisive moments. Ultimately, the CIC miscalculated Probing attacks by the CIC near Baidoa provoked the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Ethiopia to launch a counter-offensive against the CIC on December 24, 2006. Within a week, the CIC had abandoned Mogadishu, and by January 1st 2007, no longer controlled any city in Somalia. The CIC structure evaporated more quickly than anyone had anticipated, and suffered from both strategic and tactical failures, such as challenging superior Ethiopian conventional forces on open ground. The Courts were also weakened immensely by the withdrawal of support from the

Somali population. The extremists within the CIC very clearly did not reflect the will of Somalis, as represented by civil society and their government.

A Hopeful Moment In Time

So where are we now? We see the current situation in Somalia as an opportunity. To capitalize on this opportunity, the U.S. has moved quickly to engage Somalia's various stakeholders and regional governments. This approach is in keeping with Secretary Rice's Transformational Diplomacy approach. The United States' strategy for Somalia includes three major priorities.

- First, encourage inclusive political dialogue between the leadership of the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) and other key Somali stakeholders.
- Second, mobilize international support to help build the governance capacity of the TFIs and provide development and humanitarian assistance for the Somali people.
- Third, although perhaps most urgent, move forward with the deployment of an African stabilization force in Somalia.

On January 5, 2007 less than a week after the Courts were routed, Kenyan Foreign Minister Raphael Tuju, Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Raymond Johansen, and Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer co-chaired a meeting of the International Contact Group on Somalia. This gathering demonstrated the depth of the international community's commitment to supporting a sustainable political solution in Somalia through broad-based national dialogue and providing appropriate development, security, and humanitarian assistance.

The Contact Group issued a communiqué at the meeting's end that recognized the historic opportunity now within the grasp of the Somali people, as they seek a sustainable political solution based on the framework of the Transitional Federal Charter. The Contact Group also affirmed the importance of inclusive governance and additionally emphasized that funding to facilitate the deployment of a stabilization force in Somalia, based on U.N. Security Council Resolution 1725, remained urgent. This communiqué and the other views expressed by Contact Group members that day demonstrate the international community's unity on Somalia. A follow-up meeting on February 9, 2007, reaffirmed these points.

Political Dialogue

The United States believes that the key to long-term stability in Somalia now lies in a process of inclusive dialogue and reconciliation leading to the formation of an inclusive government of national unity within the framework of the Transitional Federal Charter. We see a role in the future of Somalia for all those who renounce violence and extremism, and we strongly believe that the TFG must reach out to groups that have previously been marginalized from the political process. To a great extent, this process will rely on the government's willingness to reach out and create an inclusive political process. This remains the greatest challenge.

President Yusuf has announced plans for a National Reconciliation Conference to be held in Somalia later this spring. We welcome this initiative. To be successful, however, careful preparations and informal dialogue will be essential.

Security and Stability

This national dialogue must move forward very quickly to help stabilize the situation in Somalia. But further assistance will be needed to support stability in this fragile failed stage. The United States has been working closely with the African Union (A.U.), as it prepares for the deployment of

a stabilization force. On January 19, the A.U. Peace and Security Council endorsed the deployment of this force. Several A.U. member-states have expressed their desire to contribute troops or provide logistical support for this effort.

Uganda came forward first, offering to deploy 1,600 troops based on UNSCR 1725. Ugandan President Museveni's initial offer has since been followed by other countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, and Burundi, expressing a desire to provide troops for this effort. The U.S. is actively supporting the deployment of this force, particularly the Ugandan contingent, providing strategic transportation, equipment, and other logistical assistance. Immediate U.S. support includes \$2 million for strategic transportation and \$8 million for equipment for the Ugandan force. A first contingent of some 300 Ugandan troops deployed to Mogadishu yesterday, March 6, and the Ugandan deployment continues.

The A.U. is leading and coordinating this effort. Africans have developed considerable experience in conflict resolution and peacekeeping in recent years. As Nigeria took the lead in Liberia and South Africa did in Burundi, we are hopeful that Africans will once again help one of their "sister countries" move beyond strife and toward reconciliation. In taking the long view of Somalia's security, the U.S. government remains deeply troubled that foreign terrorists associated with al Qaeda succeeded in establishing a safe haven in Somalia. Somalia's continued exploitation by terrorist elements would threaten the stability of the entire Horn.

Consequently, the U.S. continues to work with East African countries to build their capacity to counter terrorism and criminality that originates in Somalia. The U.S. government remains committed to neutralizing the threat that al Qaeda poses to all Americans, Somalis, and citizens in neighboring African countries. The U.S. will continue working with Somalis, regardless of clan, religious, or secular affiliation to eliminate this common threat.

Supporting the Transitional Federal Institutions

Meanwhile, support to the transitional institutions and the Somali people is critical to prevent spoilers and extremists from undermining stability. Given the absence of functioning governance institutions in Somalia for more than fifteen years, building governance and security institutions will largely involve starting from scratch and require significant external assistance. It is critically important that the U.S. help enhance the governance capacity of the Transitional Federal Institutions, as well as at the local and regional level. In this regard, U.S. assistance aimed at supporting short term, quick-impact, and high-visibility programs will be a critical element in building support for the Transitional Federal Institutions and demonstrating to the Somali people that their government offer a means of improving their overall quality of life.

At the January 5, 2007, meeting of the International Contact Group on Somalia, Assistant Secretary Frazer signaled the U.S. government's intention to provide \$40.5 million in new assistance for Somalia as a "down payment" toward further support. And, indeed, more funding has already been identified. This contribution is a reflection of our commitment to Somalia's revitalization. Funds will be used for deployment of a peace support mission and to provide development assistance for the Somali people. The DoS has requested \$60 million in FY 2007 supplemental funding for Somalia, including \$40 million for peacekeeping and \$20 million in humanitarian assistance, for those affected by the current humanitarian crisis in Somalia.

Conclusion

To sum up, the situation inside Somalia has changed a great deal over the past year or so. While conditions are highly fluid, on balance we see developments as positive, representing a new opportunity for Somalis.

The United States, along with our international partners, has made significant progress toward supporting the transitional institutions, encouraging reconciliation, and moving forward with rapid deployment of African peacekeeping forces. All of these measures add to stability and reduce the risk of Somalia remaining a failed state and terrorist safe haven.

This will be hard work and there will be setbacks along the way. But one important factor continues to work strongly in our collective favor. The Somali people are tired of war and yearn for stability, security, and representative governance. With the international community in an important supporting role, we are hopeful the Somalis will see more progress during the course of 2007.