

Old Cards Reshuffled

Stability in Somalia Can Only Be Achieved through Representative Government

Annette Weber

The military escalation in Somalia over the last several weeks has repercussions that go far beyond this collapsed state in the Horn of Africa. Intervention by the Ethiopian military has helped the interim government to establish itself in Mogadishu for the first time. Its adversary, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), has been driven back into the south of the country. Fighters of the UIC reintegrated smoothly into their former clan affiliations and militias. In early January 2007, the US Air Force attacked suspected al-Qaeda members in southern Somalia. If the conflict develops into a civil war or the former warlords return, Somalia is likely to slide back into the disastrous condition it was in during the 1990s. In order to prevent this, comprehensive dialogue should be initiated—dialogue that integrates the moderate elements of the UIC.

Since the overthrow of dictator Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia has been without government. Clan-based warlords filled the power vacuum of the collapsed state. The international peace mission UNOSOM II was withdrawn in 1995 after three years in which it was unable to achieve its objectives. In June 2006, the UIC took power and by mid-December 2006 won control over all important areas of Somalia. This improved the security situation, at least in Mogadishu—roadblocks were lifted and the harbour reopened. Chaos seemed to have made way for a new order.

Following the defeat of the UIC at the hands of the Ethiopian army in late December 2006, and even more so since the US air strikes, positions within the UIC have become increasingly polarised. While the

more moderate forces plan to negotiate with the interim government, the militant ones are retreating to impenetrable regions of Somalia or have left the country altogether. Around 3.000 UIC fighters are thought to still be in the Mogadishu area. The fighters of the most militant UIC militia, the Shabab, have rallied in the Juba Valley on the border with Kenya. Some members of this force have already announced that they intend to wage a guerrilla war, a jihad, against the Ethiopian army, the interim government and forces of the upcoming AU mission for Somalia AMISOM.

The African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Said Djinnit, announced in mid February that more than 4.000 troops for an AU peacekeeping mission have been pledged by five African nations.

The Interim Government

In the autumn of 2004, the Somali parliament in exile formed an interim government in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi. However, neither the composition of the parliament nor the nomination of the government lived up to democratic standards. Parliamentary seats and ministerial positions were essentially allocated according to clan strength, and patronage played a major role in appointments to important positions. The strongest clan in Mogadishu, the Hawiye, has since been underrepresented in the interim government, since many members of this clan are in the UIC. The appointment of Abdullahi Yusuf, the president of the Autonomous Republic of Puntland in northern Somalia, to be president of the interim government can hardly be seen as a step towards politics of integration in Somalia. Yusuf is considered pro-Ethiopian and is said to have an authoritarian style of leadership.

The interim government has not yet presented any political programme. Its demands of lifting the arms embargo and supporting America in its war on international terrorism are hardly conducive to winning the hearts and minds of the population. In financial and military terms the government is almost completely dependent on international aid, and there is considerable friction between the clan leaders represented in it. The international community speaks with one voice highlighting the urgency in forming an integrative, representative government in Somalia. However, President Yusuf continues to be reluctant to share power with former UIC members.

Union of Islamic Courts (UIC)

The amalgamation of the country's various Sharia courts in 2000 to form a joint platform, the UIC reflected a process of politicisation. From that point onwards, the UIC demanded the right to form the central government. Some of its leaders, such as Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, tied this

demand to nationalist rhetoric and propagated the idea of a Greater Somalia to include the Ethiopian province of Ogaden.

Businesspeople in particular, the most influential social force in Somalia, hoped that the UIC would bring a certain degree of order, an end to the roadblocks and a reopening of Mogadishu harbour. After the UIC took control of the capital, the population was at first relieved to be freed of the warlords' terror. But UIC's radicalisation of the Islamic order soon met with disapproval among Somalis, who overwhelmingly adhere to Sufism (Islamic mysticism). It is becoming increasingly difficult to identify moderate UIC members, due to their current hiding behind clan structures, their flight in the south of the country or their escape in neighbouring countries.

The Actors and their Allies

The regional rifts and loyalties that currently characterise Somalia are reflected in the pattern of different actors and their supporters. Ethiopia intervened on the side of the interim government—because the interim government was hard pressed by the advance of the UIC and was only able to hold out with great effort in Baidoa, its provisional capital. If the interim government had surrendered Baidoa and gone into exile, the UIC would have gained ultimate control of Somalia. Ethiopia's interests were directly affected by the UIC's support for Ethiopian rebels and its threat of unleashing a jihad against Ethiopia to annex the Ogaden and create a Greater Somali state.

However, even if it is true that some UIC spokesmen have connections to radical Islamist groups the generalized claim that the UIC cooperates with al-Qaeda still lacks conclusive evidence. According to a United Nations report, several UIC militias were trained in Eritrea, others by Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Libya. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, mentioned above, the leader of a radical wing of the UIC, founded al-Itihad al-Islamiya (AIAI), an Islamist group in

Somalia that has long been cooperating with other militant organisations in regional networks. Members of the UIC group led by Sheikh Aweys are suspected of involvement in the 1998 bombings of the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). They are also accused of being behind the attacks on a hotel in Mombasa and the failed attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner in Kenya. Other supporters of Aweys are responsible for the murder of journalists, peace activists and humanitarian aid workers.

The US air strikes, supported by Ethiopian helicopters, were directed mainly against the suspected leader of al-Qaeda in East Africa, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, and his two assistants Abu Taha al Sudani and Ali Saleh Nabhan. US communiqués associate these three men closely with Sheikh Aweys and his ally Aden Hashi Farah Ayro, the leader of the radical military wing of the UIC youth organisation Shabab; Aweys and Ayro, both members of the Ayr clan, are also on the U.S. list of terrorist organisations. The militancy which undoubtedly characterises these forces cannot, however, be imputed to all members of the UIC. Some UIC courts originated in local Sharia courts, solving social legal disputes.

Whereas Uganda has allied itself with the interim government under President Yusuf and Kenya is trying to prevent Somali Islamists from using its territory as a safe haven or springboard, Somalia's northern regional neighbours are opposed to Ethiopia's intervention. Eritrea is interested chiefly in destabilising Ethiopia. To this end it aids Ethiopian rebels and supports the UIC fighters by training them, supplying weapons and providing military personnel and logistics. Sudan, whose government has long maintained contacts with the radical wing of the UIC and is working towards establishing its hegemony in the Horn of Africa in opposition to Ethiopia (with Eritrea's assistance), also has no interest in a Somali satellite state under Ethiopian control. Finally, Iran hopes to

spread its brand of Islam in Somalia to counterbalance Saudi influence.

Possible Developments

Since 1991, the international community has endeavoured to stabilise Somalia from the outside in various ways. But financial assistance and other support for the interim government, various peace initiatives, a UN blue helmet mission and activities in the scope of the anti-terror operation "Enduring Freedom" have all failed to achieve this goal. Since the difficult UN mission UNOSOM II in Somalia in 1993-95, there have been no further peace missions aimed at containing the ongoing conflict between the warlords. Several initiatives to form governments have failed. With Security Council Resolution 1725 of 6 December 2006, the African Union (AU) was given the mandate to put together a peace support mission for Somalia. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union adopted this position in its communiqué of 19 January 2007 and asked for a UN takeover mission after six-month deployment of AMISOM.

However, by the end of January 2007, at the 8th summit of the African Union, only 2,500 troops out of the 6,700 called for by the AU had been pledged by Uganda, Malawi and Nigeria. Ghana and Burundi are willing to provide further troops. But with the exception of Uganda, no country has specified their force level nor a possible deployment date. Ethiopia, on the other hand, is under financial pressure to withdraw its troops, so the possibility of a hand-over from Ethiopian forces to AMISOM is slim. However, without a larger security framework, a mission with a small contingent of troops and poor funding will not be able to contribute to peace and stability in Somalia. It is furthermore at risk of becoming party to the conflict. The UICs have threatened to attack potential AU peacekeepers, calling them invaders and announcing a jihad against the mission. Security Council Resolution 1725 states the AU peace support operation should assist

and provide protection for the interim government. This might put the operation in the dilemma of being biased, specifically if the interim government continues to block inclusive talks with Islamic court members.

There is a danger that the interim government will be perceived first and foremost as a puppet of the occupying forces. The security situation in Mogadishu is deteriorating daily. The interim government announced a state of emergency as well as a curfew. Ethiopian military installations and personnel are being attacked in Mogadishu on a daily basis.

The US air strikes on suspected al-Qaeda positions on the border with Kenya have led to further polarisation. Renewed appeals by the senior al-Qaeda leader Al Zawahiri to start a jihad against the “occupation forces” and their proxies is a sign that the conflict in Somalia could escalate in the weeks and months ahead.

On the other hand, a full Ethiopian withdrawal would inevitably result in a defeat of the interim government and a power vacuum, which would be filled almost immediately by the former warlord structures. Though a number of warlords followed the interim government’s appeal to disarm and handed in some of their weapons and armed vehicles, Mogadishu is again under control of warlords.

The UIC militias have been weakened but not destroyed. Even after the intervention of the Ethiopians and the US air strike, they can still serve as a tool for all kind of interests in the region.

The International Community

Just a few weeks before Ethiopia’s intervention, the AU and the UN Security Council agreed that none of Somalia’s neighbours should be involved in a peace mission in the country. This political agreement would still make sense now, notwithstanding the invasion by neighbouring Ethiopia, since the conflicts in Somalia cannot be resolved militarily. Integrating the UIC into a representative government is the only way to

stabilise the country in the long term. In the current military situation, however, the dispatch of a small AU mission would create problems of its own—particularly if no united effort is undertaken to work on a political process to include moderate UIC elements. AMISOM forces that appeared to be protection forces for the interim government only would likely be subjected to guerrilla warfare in Mogadishu.

The unilateral decision by the US administration to finance the deployment of the Ugandan contingent might again call into question the neutrality of an AU mission. There is a need for a coherent strategy to solve the problem in Somalia. The international community would be well advised to speak with one voice. The efforts should be focused on a political solution and support to build a security environment that allows the revival of an effective state structure in Somalia.

Mediation talks between the interim government and the moderate forces in the UIC, who renounce violence, must begin as soon as possible. The Somalia Contact Group, including the UN, AU, AL, EU the U.S., the UK, Norway, Sweden, Kenya, Tanzania and Italy, should make a point of supporting this. The EU stated that negotiations by the interim government with moderate UIC members would be a precondition to release the 15 million euros from the African Peace Facility basket to finance part of an AU mission.

At the same time, the constant flow of weapons to Somalia must be stopped. According to a report of the UN monitoring group which oversees the sanctions on arms deliveries to Somalia, a number of states have contravened the embargo. These include the USA, Ethiopia and Uganda (in favour of the interim government) and Eritrea, Egypt, Iran, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syria (in favour of the UIC). Yemen has supplied arms to both sides.

A number of initiatives are currently under way discussing possibilities to form a representative government. Western members of the Contact Group hold talks

with the former head of the UIC executive branch, Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed in Kenya. Countries such as Oman, Sudan and Yemen discuss options to bring various Somali factions back to the negotiating table.

Despite clear signals from the international community convincing the interim government to hold inclusive dialogue, there is a clear lack of commitment to include UIC members. The speaker of parliament—Sharif Hassan—was removed because of his attempts to discuss with UIC members. These are not encouraging signals for an inclusive political settlement. Further changes in the weak and internally fragmented interim government, such as the reshuffling of ministerial posts in early February 2007, are no sign of consolidation. The interim government prefers talks with clan elders, by sidelining clan leaders who are influential members in the UIC. This might provoke further fractionalization amongst the clans and will not result in a stable, inclusive and representative political framework for Somalia.

A special mediation group is required in order to initiate talks between the interim government and moderate UIC members. Under the German EU presidency, the EU should facilitate talks between the interim government and moderate UIC members and actively support regional mediation activities.

© Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2007
All rights reserved

SWP
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4
10719 Berlin
Telephone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org

ISSN 1861-1761