



Transcript

Stability and Development in Somalia

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Alex Vines:

Thank you to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) for inviting me here to speak to you today to help frame some of the discussions you will be engaged in today. The challenges faced by Somalia, and the challenges these present to the international community are complex, and we at Chatham House have been for some years working to understand them and explain that understanding to audiences such as this in ways which help you find solutions. Of course, we are still some way off identifying and implementing those much needed solutions, but the progress Somalia, and the international community has made in recent years, including through processes such as this one, and the London conference held in London earlier this year – demonstrate that those solutions are out there, and we at Chatham House remain committed to continuing to engage closely. Having said this I am aware that many of you may not be familiar with Chatham House – other than perhaps with a familiarity with our ‘rule’ so perhaps I ought to say a few words about what and who we are, and the way in which we work.

Chatham House, also known as the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is an independent international affairs think-tank based in London and founded in 1920. We aim to support more informed and effective decision making on international affairs, and the Africa Programme of which I am head is celebrating our tenth anniversary at Chatham House during which time it has grown to become the largest independent centre for research and debate on Africa’s changing international political engagements. The way we work is varied, but one relevant example is that we have recently completed an assessment of the EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, which was commissioned by the European Parliament, and touches on a number of issues you may be discussing today.

The Africa Programme has been working on the politics of the Horn of Africa for about 6 years. During that time, Somalia’s political situation has formed a key strand of research, being a pivotal point for regional competition and instability. The argument that we have long made - that piracy is only one symptom of a wider issue of insecurity on land and a lack of governance in Somalia, is an argument shared by a multiplicity of stakeholders. Because the Horn of Africa is a region that is deeply interconnected, an approach to tackle the issue from a regional perspective is most likely to meet success. In this regard, it is encouraging to see that the European Union is beginning to channel its efforts in support of a multi-layered solution – one increasingly led

by Somalis, backed by the region and supported by the international community.

With this in mind let me explain the situation in Somalia now as we see it, and offer some thoughts as to how things may be developing with a particular eye for your discussions today.

If we first look at the economic and development situation, a key point that we feel is important to keep in mind is that the Horn of Africa is a region with deep and longstanding economic inter-connections that predate the creation of colonial borders. Somalis have built a particularly strong telecommunications industry and the livestock trade has withstood shifting political relations between Somalia and its neighbours, and changes in the security situation in the southern part of the country.

However, the lack of a formal economy and of a stable government able to collect taxes from its population means that the state is not in a position to benefit from the economic activity which does take place within and across its borders. Insecurity on-shore and in its territorial waters mean that despite having the longest coastline in Africa, at 3025 kilometres, Somalia is unable to exploit its ports for trade between the region and the rest of the world, in the way that neighbouring Djibouti and Kenya have done.

In a country where the annual GDP per capita is about \$600, and employment opportunities for the young adults are severely lacking, it is little wonder that the potential of earning of up to \$6,000 for an armed pirate foot soldier taking part in a successful hijacking of a commercial vessel remains a temptation. The sharp decline in the fishing industry in Somalia's coastal areas is commonly pointed to as a reason behind piracy. Yet, little has been done to alleviate persistent stories of illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping in Somali waters. And for those who continue to fish, being restricted to local markets means that less money can be made from a catch - before piracy became endemic Somali fishermen could make a good living trading into the Gulf market.

This being the case, many families are entirely dependent on remittances for survival. \$1.6 billion is sent back to Somalia by the diaspora each year. People-smugglers exploit the prospects of opportunities abroad, charging upwards of \$150 to transport Somalis to Yemen. A colleague of mine who was on-board a recent counter-piracy mission in the Indian Ocean told me that naval officers have seen boats suited to transporting ten people, ferrying up to fifty people from Somalia's shores towards Yemen, often without sufficient water or navigation equipment. Puntland's President Farole's pledge

to crack down on known trafficking routes has seen some success, but people-smugglers are aware that naval missions mandated to counter piracy are limited in their ability to disrupt trafficking, and so continue to jeopardise lives at sea.

Food insecurity in Somalia has also led to massive displacement. The famine declared in the summer of 2011 came out of the region's worst drought in 60 years. It was compounded by a slow response to early warnings for the urgent need of food aid. In south-central Somalia - al Shabaab's banning and restrictions on humanitarian agencies' access to areas which needed aid the most, prevented them from building up capacity in the run-up to the crisis. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 3.8 million people required assistance in Somalia during the recent famine - over a third of the country's population. The situation left 1.3 million people internally displaced, and the number of Somali refugees in surrounding countries rose to over a million.

Somalia's development issues not only contribute to instability in the country but are also perpetuated by that instability. The last decade has seen two Ethiopian military interventions in Somalia, plus one Kenyan intervention and continuing insurgency. Insecurity in one country is frequently linked to another. States in the region have intervened in their neighbours' conflicts for decades. Many state borders cut through economic or social zones, providing avenues for the transmission of instability from one to the other. Arid and semiarid regions in Somalia, eastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya form one such region – with trade, linguistic and religious ties forming linkages across borders. Somalia's lack of stable central government has meant that this cycle is difficult to break. Weak local governance and security are commonly cited as chief among on-land causes of piracy, and the ability of pirates to act with impunity has hindered efforts to defeat it.

Yet despite this rather gloomy picture, there is some optimism in Mogadishu surrounding recent events, and in particular the appointments of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon - neither of whom are tainted by association with past political experience in Somalia – as well as the new ten person Somali cabinet, which includes a female Deputy Prime Minister for the first time.

This optimism is tempered by the presence of a number of former MPs, including some warlords, in the new slim-line 275 member parliament. This could indicate a continuation of the vested interests and obstruction of attempts to build effective and accountable institutions which so dogged the

Transitional Federal Government. A recent report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, which detailed links between the TFG and a known pirate leader who was granted a diplomatic passport endorsed by Somalia's then-President, indicates the political influence wielded by those with monetary clout.

I am cautiously optimistic that the new government will have the ability to affect some meaningful progress in the security and stability of the country, including in the northern coastal areas from where pirate attacks occur. President Mohamud was certainly a surprise winner to many international observers. His history as a prominent civil society actor and academic, who stayed in Somalia following the collapse of the state, is an important indicator of the Somali-owned nature of this new administration. The legitimising effect that this could have on the current government should not be underestimated, and draws a sharp contrast to the TFG which was seen by many Somalis as riddled with corruption, dominated by members of the diaspora and legitimised by international, not domestic, endorsement.

The key to maintaining the renewed optimism apparent amongst many Somalis is a sense of Somali ownership over domestic politics. Despite the welcome contribution forces from the AU are playing, Somali National Security Forces must be seen to be equal players in the effort to extend security beyond the Mogadishu suburbs, into areas where al Shabaab has been pushed out – including the port town of Kismayo, and the new parliament has to be seen as representative of the country as a whole, not just of Mogadishu.

This is no small undertaking. As well as requiring good politicians, this will depend on much stronger institutions, and crucially, the building of professional national security forces which are loyal to the nation above clan or individual interests, and who can be trusted and respected to maintain the law.

This will take time and require resources. The European Union has contributed to the reform of the Somali security sector through training and support for Somali forces in Uganda since 2010. Yet, in accordance with its mandate, European Union Training Mission Somalia will end in December 2012.

The operation has been largely symbolic, but having trained almost 3000 recruits, EUTM is a step in the right direction and directly supports the capacity of the Somali National Security Forces by building command and control structures through properly trained officers. Professional Somali

National Security Forces will require in the first instance regular and sufficient payment of soldiers, addressing the fact that AMISOM troops receive far larger wages, and re-deploying training back to Somalia. These are priorities for the government to grapple with in its first year, with the continued support of regional and international partners.

Turning to local governance, the international community has invested heavily in Somalia's political transition, but it is not yet clear how support for the new government will be balanced with engagement with Somalia's semi-autonomous regional entities. Puntland and Somaliland have been stakeholders in counter-piracy efforts since 2008, and the EU's inclusion of Galmudug in plans to strengthen Somalia's judicial capacity through EUCAP NESTOR indicates that engagement with these sub-national authorities will continue. This is understandable, particularly as the vast majority of pirate attacks since 2008 have been launched from bases in Puntland, and the governments in Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug are able to wield varying amounts of authority over their territories.

Yet, a policy dilemma arises when the international community backs the establishment of representative politics at a national level in Somalia, whilst simultaneously engaging with, and strengthening authorities who have declared various degrees of autonomy from the central government. This dilemma could impact Somalia's domestic politics, as the new central government begins to negotiate its relationships with Somalia's regional authorities. Any inconsistency on the part of the international community could also be significant for the continued transfer of convicted pirates back to Somali territory.

Somaliland is often referred to as the most stable region of Somalia: the 2010 elections saw the presidency transferred to an opposition political party, a rare exception in Africa. Facilities to incarcerate pirates opened in 2010 following a \$1.5 million refurbishment by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and as of August 2012 Somaliland had taken in 313 pirates as prisoners. However, Somaliland's engagement with the rest of the world has been almost completely focused on gaining international recognition for its self-declared independence from Somalia.

Following the transfer of pirates convicted in the Seychelles, Somaliland's Anti-Piracy Taskforce Head was quoted as saying:

"As long as states are reaching agreements and signing memorandums of understanding with us, that's a clear sign of de facto recognition".

Somaliland's willingness to continue to accept pirates will depend on whether this is seen as politically expedient for the region's campaign to secure its separation from Somalia. This ambition is not shared by the government in Mogadishu, and the wider Horn region is reluctant to see another secession take place on its doorstep following South Sudan's struggles. The international community needs to be aware of the political impact its engagement could have for Somalia's domestic politics.

Finally – with regards to security, advances by AMISOM, Ethiopian forces and Somali national forces have led to the ousting of al Shabaab from fixed positions around Mogadishu, in Afgooye, Kismayo and in south-west Somalia. These movements are too often reported as conclusive defeats of al Shabaab, which overstates the case. Although the security situation in Mogadishu has undoubtedly improved, suicide bombings continue to occur.

There is, nevertheless, a reportedly marked shift in the mood in Somalia, particularly in Mogadishu, where gains have been in place the longest. The capital has seen a significant rise in business and reconstruction activity. And although security remains a challenge – the hope is that by delivering services to Somalis, the new government will gain legitimacy and move some way towards building on those security gains - defeating al Shabaab politically as well as militarily.

The loss of the port of Kismayo may have dented al Shabaab's ability to garner revenue, but reports – including from the President of Puntland - of the presence of up to 400 Shabaab fighters in Puntland's mountainous region, which borders Ethiopia and Somaliland, indicate that the terrorist organization has been able to maintain its connection to supplies and finances coming from the long-established smuggling routes to Yemen. The group will remain a threat and certainly continue to be a destabilizing influence. Recent reports of the seizure of arms on a Yemeni boat heading towards Puntland's coast should raise concerns that al Shabaab has a growing interest in the maritime domain where up till now piracy has been the sole concern. Arguments that no strategic link exists between pirates and al Shabaab could become increasingly difficult to make as the two groups converge in the same space.

The presence of 16,000 soldiers from Burundi, Djibouti, Uganda and Kenya in Somalia is an immediate reminder of the region's interest in Somalia's security. The interconnected nature of the Horn of Africa means that the self-interested motivations of regional countries for engagement with Somalia needs to be recognized – Uganda's threat to withdraw troops from Somalia, while unlikely to be carried out, was made in retaliation to UN allegations of its

involvement with DRC rebels, and without – it seems – an acknowledgement of the fact that its presence in Somalia helps to protect Uganda domestically from terrorism on its soil.

I would argue that governments of the Horn have not prioritised support of Somalia's maritime security to the same degree as the international community. The need to protect recent oil and gas finds in Kenyan, Tanzanian and Mozambican waters may soon change attitudes.

Somalia's regional and international partners should focus in the next few months on how to transform the momentum injected into the Roadmap process into policy attention and diplomatic support, or pressure, needed to see the new administration develop into more of a functional government that can focus on the provision of services beyond the attention already paid to the security sector. At the same time Somalia's partners should take care not to taint perception of Somali-led administration by overly-interfering. Somalia's Horn of African neighbours are likely to remain firmly engaged but must be willing to cede authority to the new government as its capacity grows.

Somalia's transition continues and the new administration faces many of the same challenges that threatened the TFG, and some others generated by the Roadmap process itself. Some progress has been made in Mogadishu, and Somalis – especially in civil society and the private sector – are in a position to build upon that base. In the next year the government needs to demonstrate that it is capable of cementing this progress, building its own security capacity and slowly extending meaningful stability beyond Mogadishu, to provide Somalis with a tangible improvement in their living conditions. Even in a best case scenario this will be a drawn out and messy process. Local authorities are unlikely to be able to prioritize counter piracy efforts in a way in which many in this audience might wish. This being the case, international efforts will remain key to maintaining the welcome reduction in pirate attacks we have seen of late. All the while pirate tactics will continue to adapt to seek to regain the initiative. We can't assume the nature of the threat will remain static, and I'm afraid this is unlikely to be the last such gathering you are all likely to attend. Certainly the international maritime presence will continue to play a vital role in maintaining the progress made to date, but I hope we can at least say that the piracy business - for all of us - has reached its peak, and is now on a frustratingly slow but steady decline as Somalia's prospects, cautiously, improve.

Thank you very much.