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SOMALIA: A NATIONAL AND REGIONAL DISASTER?

A Writenet Report by Ken Menkhaus

**commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,
Emergency and Technical Support Service**

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Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
ARS	Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia
EAAQ	East Africa Al-Qaeda
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
(UN)OCHA	(United Nations) Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
US(A)	United States (of America)
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary¹

After a two year crisis that rendered Somalia the site of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, political developments in 2009 offer reasons for cautious optimism. The establishment of a new more broad-based Transitional Federal Government (TFG), and the withdrawal of Ethiopian occupying forces, are important positive developments. Even so, Somalia still faces daunting challenges, and aid agencies need to prepare for multiple outcomes in 2009 and beyond.

In a best case scenario, the new TFG succeeds in gradually expanding its authority and negotiates to bring much of the armed opposition into the government. This reduces armed conflict, improves security and governance, deflates the jihadist Shabaab movement, and provides aid agencies with a more permissive environment to help address the country's massive humanitarian needs. Both immediate aid to the country's 3.2 million people in need of emergency relief and significant development assistance to bolster Somalia's longer-term economic recovery will be needed in this outcome. For UNHCR, the focus will be on assistance to internally displaced populations and refugees seeking to return home.

In the worst case scenario, the TFG collapses, hard-line Islamists consolidate control, and Somalia becomes the site of a major struggle drawing in powerful external actors. Drought worsens, producing famine conditions in the countryside. This outcome could produce large-scale refugee flows and a humanitarian crisis of vast proportions.

In a third scenario, Somalia falls into a *status quo ante* of political collapse, in which the country is divided into quarrelling fiefdoms controlled by an array of various Islamist groups, clan militias, city-states, warlord lairs, and a weak and ineffective government. In this instance, aid agencies will have to negotiate access at a very local level, much as was the case in the recent past.

Regardless of political outcome in the coming year, the humanitarian crisis in Somalia will endure, and at least some flow of refugees into Kenya and Yemen is inevitable. Remittances from diaspora members are so critical to household survival that a significant push to place family members abroad will remain, producing a continuous flow of Somalis across borders. The 1.3 million internally displaced face a return to damaged homes and lost livelihoods and will need assistance. Insecurity will continue to disrupt commerce and increase transaction costs for businesses. Security threats to national and international staff of aid agencies will remain high and access will be very difficult. Reduced purchasing power, the result of inflation and declining remittances from the diaspora due to the global recession, will add to food insecurity in the country. These are all givens that are unlikely to change in the short term.

Political and humanitarian conditions in neighbouring countries are also fragile and susceptible to deterioration, potentially complicating efforts to reach and serve refugee populations.

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1 Introduction

For the first time in over two years, there is some good news emerging from Somalia, and reason for cautious optimism that 2009 might bring a gradual reduction in armed conflict and insecurity, improved humanitarian access, and reversal of flows of refugees and internally displaced persons. Four specific developments have come in quick succession. In December 2008, the two year Ethiopian military occupation of south-central Somalia came to an end, offering hope that this period of insurgency and counter-insurgency will end. That same month, the polarizing figure of Abdullahi Yusuf resigned as Transitional Federal Government (TFG) president. In the US, the election of President Barack Obama offers the possibility of a shift in US policy in the Horn of Africa that might create more political space for dialogue. Finally, in January 2009 the TFG and the opposition group Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) took steps to create a more broad-backed government by expanding representation in parliament and selecting a new president, opposition figure Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. Sheikh Sharif named a prime minister, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, and a new cabinet reflecting an effort to bridge both clan and factional divides in the country. None of these developments alone can redirect Somalia's political trajectory, but collectively they contribute to an environment that is more conducive to reconciliation and reduced insecurity. If nothing else, these developments offer the possibility of a dissipation of the armed insurgency and radicalism that have exploded in Somalia since late 2006.

Though fragile and vulnerable to setbacks, these improvements in Somalia are very welcome after two years of catastrophic violence. Somalia is emerging from one of the deadliest and most destructive periods in its 19 years of state collapse and civil war. The disastrous events from late 2006 through 2008 polarized the country politically and radicalized a portion of the population, badly damaged Somalia's already weak economy, and produced one of the most difficult humanitarian crises in the world. This has left a very difficult legacy for the new transitional government.

2 Background to the Current Crisis

2.1 The 2004 Peace Process and the the TFG

The drama which produced the crisis of 2006-2008 can be traced back to 2004, when an internationally backed Somali peace process based in Kenya led to an agreement to form a Transitional Federal Government. The process which culminated in the establishment of the TFG and the election of a president, Abdullahi Yusuf, was flawed and contentious, leading to accusations of foreign manipulation of the outcome and an immediate legitimacy crisis for the TFG.² Though formed as a unity government in which each major clan was apportioned a fixed number of seats in parliament and the cabinet – along the lines of the “4.5 formula” – the TFG was in fact dominated by a narrow clan and political coalition.³ It soon split between

² International Crisis Group, *Somalia: Continuation of War by Other Means?* Nairobi, 21 December 2004, p. 1, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3194&l=1> [accessed April 2009]

³ The “4.5 formula” apportions each of the four major clans an equal number of seats, while the so-called minority groups are accorded one-half that amount. The 4.5 formula was first used in national politics at the 2000 reconciliation talks at Arta Djibouti. It is very controversial in Somali political circles. Its advocates argue that it is essential for power-sharing between the clans, and merely formalizes a calculus of clan distribution that is always present in Somali negotiations anyway. Its critics argue the formula only reifies clannism and fails to solve the real problems of factional divisions which transcend clan identity.

two camps – the “Yusuf wing” (characterized as pro-Ethiopian, pro-federalist and anti-Islamist, with a power base concentrated in areas outside Mogadishu, and built around an alliance of the Majerteen/Darood clan and Abgal/Hawiye clan) and the “Mogadishu group” (anti-Ethiopian, centralist and inclusive of Islamist groups, with a power base in Mogadishu, and built around an alliance of several strong Hawiye clans). Though defections and realignments have subsequently occurred, this division, which emerged in 2005, remained the central political fault-line in Somali politics for several years thereafter. The split left the TFG weak and dysfunctional throughout 2005 and 2006, and Somalia remained in a state of de facto state collapse – a condition it has had to endure since 1991. For the first two years of its five year mandate, the TFG appeared to be stillborn.

2.2 Conflict and Ethiopian Armed Intervention

In early 2006, an extraordinary series of events challenged this political paralysis. In February 2006, armed clashes broke out between a US-backed alliance of militia leaders against a coalition of Islamist militias.⁴ That series of battles culminated in a decisive victory for the Islamists, who organized themselves as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and consolidated control over all of the capital Mogadishu in June 2006. The ICU then quickly expanded control over most of south-central Somalia. During their brief six month period of rule, the ICU made impressive gains in provision of public order and rule of law in Somalia. Most Somalis – including many who did not subscribe to an Islamist agenda – strongly supported the ICU as a result. For a time, it looked as if Somalia’s 17 year national nightmare of state collapse was over.

Unfortunately, that was not to be. Hard-line Islamists in the broad umbrella movement of the ICU took a series of provocative actions, seemingly designed to marginalize moderates in the ICU and heighten tensions with neighbouring Ethiopia and the US government. They forged close relations with Ethiopia’s regional nemesis Eritrea, provided backing to two armed insurgencies fighting the Ethiopian government, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), declared jihad on Ethiopia, called for a popular uprising in Ethiopia against the Meles Zenawi government, and summarily dismissed requests by the US government to take action against Al-Qaeda operatives suspected of using Mogadishu as a safe haven.

After a series of skirmishes, Ethiopia launched a full-scale military offensive against the ICU in late December 2006, routing the Islamists in a matter of days. The ICU dissolved itself, its political leaders fled the country, and its defeated militia – including a core force of several hundred well-trained and committed fighters known as the Shabaab – scattered in the countryside. In a development no one foresaw, Ethiopian forces occupied the capital Mogadishu without a shot.⁵

Ethiopia, the US, the UN, and other interested actors quickly sought to use the new political dispensation to revive the moribund TFG, which was brought into Mogadishu to govern under the protection of Ethiopian forces. International efforts were made to strengthen the TFG’s governing capacity and security sector, to promote reconciliation and power-sharing in order to broaden the TFG’s appeal among Somalis, and to deploy quickly an African Union

⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the events of 2006-2007, see Menkhaus, K., *The Crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in Five Acts*, *African Affairs*, No. 106, Summer 2007, pp. 357-90

⁵ Barnes, C. and H. Hassan, *The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu’s Islamic Courts*, London: Chatham House, April 2007, <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/458/> [accessed April 2009]

peacekeeping mission (AMISOM – African Union Mission to Somalia) to replace the Ethiopian forces. Everyone understood that the prolonged presence of Ethiopian occupying forces would provoke armed resistance. But African governments were unwilling to send troops into such a high-risk mission. Eventually 2,000 Ugandan and Burundian forces were deployed to the AMISOM mission, far short of the 8,000 sought. Ethiopian troops stayed on as a result.

2.3 Ethiopian Occupation and Violent Resistance

Armed resistance against the Ethiopian forces and the TFG emerged within weeks, and by March 2007 the city was wracked by heavy insurgency and counter-insurgency violence. Armed resistance was spearheaded by a regrouped and enlarged Shabaab, but also included many clan militias and others, constituting a loosely organized “complex insurgency”. Insurgents mainly used mortar attacks and ambushes, but also employed improvised explosive devices to hit passing convoys, and political assassinations against Somalis collaborating with the TFG or Ethiopians. Retaliation by the TFG and Ethiopian forces was very heavy handed. Uncontrolled TFG forces engaged in looting, assaults, and political assassinations against the Mogadishu population, which it believed sympathized with the insurgents. Ethiopian forces launched indiscriminate attacks on densely populated neighbourhoods used by insurgents. In April 2007, exceptionally heavy retaliatory attacks by Ethiopia promoted a massive displacement of civilians into the countryside. Aid agencies estimated that over 400,000 residents were displaced by the April 2007 fighting, and that over 700,000 Somalis in total were internally displaced. Those numbers grew to 1.3 million by 2008.⁶

The massive displacement caused by the fighting in Mogadishu was the most important element of a “perfect storm” which by late 2007 produced in Somalia the worst humanitarian crisis in the world.⁷ Drought hammered much of the country in 2007 and 2008. Hyperinflation, caused by counterfeiting of the Somalia currency by political and business figures, robbed average Somalis of purchasing power. The spike in global prices for food and fuel put added stress on households. Finally, high levels of insecurity, mainly the result of looting and roadblocks by uncontrolled, unpaid TFG security forces, blocked commercial traffic and severely constrained humanitarian aid shipments into the country. At one point international relief agencies counted nearly 400 armed roadblocks in southern Somalia, each demanding as much as US\$ 500 per truck.

Collectively these factors placed enormous pressure on household coping mechanisms, and contributed to a slowly unfolding humanitarian crisis in which 3.5 million Somalis (of a total population of about 6 million in south-central Somalia) were in need of humanitarian assistance by early 2009.⁸

⁶ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Somalia 2009 Consolidated Appeal*, Nairobi, November 2008, p. 9, <http://ochaonline.un.org/cap2005/webpage.asp?Page=1712> [accessed April 2009]

⁷ Menkhaus, K., *Somalia: A Country in Peril, A Policy Nightmare*, Washington: Enough, September 2008, http://www.enoughproject.org/files/reports/somalia_rep090308.pdf [accessed April 2009]

⁸ The estimate of Somalis in need of emergency food aid has steadily increased since mid-2008, from 3 to 3.5 million people.

2.4 Internal and External Displacement

Throughout 2007-2008, conditions for cross-border flight were poor, creating disincentives for Somalis to seek refuge in neighbouring states. Invoking security concerns, the Kenyan government closed its border with Somalia, trapping thousands of would-be refugees on the Somali side of the border and prompting protests from UNHCR and human rights groups. Somalis who crossed the border illegally were subject to arrest, extortion, and deportation. Nonetheless, insecurity inside Somalia was so high that refugee flows reached crisis level, and refugees who made their way to Dabaab refugee camp in northern Kenya found conditions there very difficult due to severe overcrowding. By March 2008 Dabaab was hosting 261,000 refugees, even though it was intended to accommodate a maximum of 90,000. An estimated 60,000 new refugees arrived in Dabaab in 2008 alone, and another 20,000 arrived in the first three months of 2009, severely straining the capacity of aid agencies to provide basic assistance.⁹

Flight across the Ethiopian border was even more unattractive, as a major insurgency and counter-insurgency starting in 2007, which pitted the Ethiopian government against the ONLF, created very inhospitable conditions for ethnic Somalis there, although by early 2009 Somali refugees began arriving in Dolo, Ethiopia. Passage to Yemen was arguably the most dangerous option of all, as hundreds of Somalis drowned at sea when unscrupulous human traffickers forced them overboard far from shore. Djibouti was one of the few reasonably attractive options for Somali refugees, and by late 2008 had attracted tens of thousands of refugees, many unreported. Djibouti has been a convenient site for those seeking to cross to Yemen by boat, but as a refuge for refugees it too had drawbacks, including very high cost of living and a widespread humanitarian crisis in which half the population was in need of emergency food assistance in 2008.

As a result of these inhospitable options in the wider region, most displaced Somalis remained inside the country, even though their access to assistance was quite poor. Some of the displaced fled to safer sections of the city, but most fled Mogadishu altogether. The largest concentration of IDPs congregated in a string of camps along the Mogadishu-Afgoi corridor, 10 to 30 km outside the capital. That area became one of the largest single concentrations of IDPs in the world, with an estimated 100,000-200,000 people living in makeshift dwellings there at any given point in time. Others fled to clan home territories, especially in Middle Shabelle and Hiran regions, and to the semi-arid central regions of Galgaduud and Mudug. Tens of thousands of other IDPs from south-central Somalia fled to Puntland and Somaliland. Hargeisa (Somaliland) became an especially important refuge and business site, often for somewhat better-off Somalis and their families.

2.5 Worsening Political and Security Situation

In the midst of this major humanitarian emergency, the political crisis driving it worsened in late 2007 and 2008. Insurgency and counter-insurgency violence spread beyond Mogadishu to the countryside. The TFG's control over territory shrank dramatically, so that by mid-2008 most of the country was beyond its control. Deep divisions in both the TFG and the armed opposition led to open schism and greater political fragmentation. The opposition leadership in exile formed a broad umbrella movement of Islamists and non-Islamists known as the

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Thousands of Somalis Continue to Flee to Northeastern Kenya, Geneva, 27 March 2009 (press statement), <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/49ccb8982.html> [accessed April 2009]

Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). The ARS split into two camps. The more moderate wing came to be known as ARS-Djibouti, led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Sharif Hassan (known as the “two Sharifs”); the hardline group, ARS-Asmara, came to be led by Hassan Dahir Aweys. The two camps split over preconditions for dialogue with the TFG. Meanwhile, the Shabaab militia broke with the entire ARS in exile, declared itself the lead player in the armed resistance, and emerged as the strongest armed group in southern Somalia, taking control over most of the territory between the Kenyan border and Mogadishu. Its jihadist politics and links to Al-Qaeda alarmed US and other external actors, and in March 2008 the US Department of State designated Shabaab a terrorist organization, despite the fact that it had up to that point directed virtually all of its violence not at the US but at Ethiopian forces, the TFG, and Somali “collaborators”. When the US military successfully targeted and killed the Shabaab leader Aden Hashi ‘Ayro with a Tomahawk missile in May 2008, Shabaab expanded its attacks to include all US and Western groups and individuals in Somalia and the region, as well as UN staff and any Somalis working with the UN or other Western aid agencies. The result was even higher levels of insecurity for already beleaguered international and national aid workers.¹⁰

Indeed, by 2008 Somalia was the most dangerous place in the world for humanitarian aid workers. Fully one third of all humanitarian casualties worldwide in 2008 occurred in Somalia. Between January and November of that year, 30 humanitarian workers were killed in Somalia and at least 24 NGO staff were kidnapped. About 350 militia roadblocks were identified in the country, each posing dangers to aid convoys and staff.¹¹ In January a roadside bomb in Kismayo killed three Médecins Sans Frontières staff and a journalist. In June armed men assassinated civil society activist Mohamed Hassan Kulmiye in his office in Beletweyne. In July unknown men shot dead Osman Ali Mohamed, the head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Somalia, as he left a mosque. The head of the Somalia office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was kidnapped in June and held for more than two months.¹² Shabaab demonstrated its capacity to widen its targets when in late October 2008 it launched simultaneous suicide bombing attacks in Puntland and Somaliland, killing 29. The UNDP compound in Hargeisa was among the targets; two UN staff were killed and six injured in that attack. UN staff presence in Somalia was curtailed even further in the aftermath, and the issue of humanitarian access – or lack thereof – dominated donor and aid agency policy discussions.¹³ The wave of assassinations of both aid workers and Somali civic leaders continued into 2009; in January, two World Food Programme (WFP) staff members were assassinated in two separate attacks outside of Mogadishu and in Gedo region.¹⁴ Faced with these threats and attacks, most agencies were forced to severely curtail or suspend operations. Even the WFP suspended some operations and openly considered nation-wide suspension of all emergency food aid distribution.¹⁵

¹⁰ Menkhaus, *Somalia: A Country in Peril*

¹¹ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Somalia 2009 Consolidated Appeal*, p.9

¹² Human Rights Watch, *Somalia: Events of 2008*, in its *World Report 2009*, New York, January 2009, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/79207> [accessed April 2009]

¹³ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Somalia 2009 Consolidated Appeal*, p.9

¹⁴ United Nations, Integrated Regional Information Networks, *Somalia: WFP Could Halt Food Distribution, Calls for Staff Safety*, Nairobi, 22 January 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=82510> [accessed April 2009]

¹⁵ United Nations, Integrated Regional Information Networks, *Somalia: Merka IDPs Virtually out of Food*, Nairobi, 6 March 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83338> [accessed April 2009]

The sources of these assassinations have generally been difficult to prove; accusations have been raised against the (old) TFG security forces, Shabaab, and Ethiopian National Defence Forces. UN agencies and international NGOs were viewed by government paramilitaries as providing aid to the “enemy” (TFG hardliners viewed the IDPs as sympathizers with the insurgents), while insurgents viewed western NGOs and UN agencies as spies of the West and supporters of the TFG. For UN agencies, claims that some of the killings were reprisals for UN support of the TFG was especially painful. Donor states and the UN diplomats had placed UN agencies under heavy pressure to support the TFG. For UNDP, this meant close collaboration with the TFG as the principal implementer of capacity-building, rule of law, and security sector reform projects, and serving as conduit for salary payments to the TFG police. But because the TFG was a principal target of the insurgents, this compromised efforts by UN specialized agencies to be seen as neutral in the armed conflict. Tensions within the UN and within the entire aid community ran high over three competing objectives: protecting neutrality for humanitarian activities, promoting statebuilding, and pursuing counter-terrorism objectives. Humanitarian aid agencies seeking to maintain a neutral profile and protect humanitarian space were the losers in this struggle, as their high casualty rates and suspended operations attest.

3 Recent and Current Political Developments

3.1 Djibouti Process and the Djibouti Accord

The combination of the mounting humanitarian crisis, insurgency gains, and stalled political progress produced strong international pressure on TFG Prime Minister Mohamed Ghedi to step down. Widely perceived as a hardliner who resisted any attempt to broaden the composition of the TFG, Ghedi resigned in late 2007 and was replaced by a moderate, Nur Hassan Hussein (better known as Nur Adde). Nur Adde immediately set out to promote dialogue with elements of the armed opposition, and in the summer of 2008 the Djibouti agreement was brokered between moderate elements of the ARS (led by the “two Sharifs”) and the moderate wing of the TFG (led by Nur Adde, and opposed by TFG President Yusuf and his supporters). Because these two moderate wings controlled few armed groups inside Somalia, it was unclear how they would be able to prevent the power-sharing agreement from being sabotaged by spoilers on both sides. In the months after it was signed, the Djibouti accord looked moribund. But the events noted above – the Ethiopian withdrawal, the resignation of President Yusuf, the formation of a new, more inclusive transitional government as part of the implementation of the Djibouti accord – have breathed new life into the Djibouti process and reshaped the political environment in which the country’s ongoing humanitarian emergencies are unfolding.

Though a new TFG was formed out of the Djibouti accord, the broader notion of the Djibouti process continues to be invoked as the central pillar of political progress – the commitment to dialogue, a broad-based government, and moderation. Donor governments have made a point of emphasizing their support for the process, suggesting that promoting dialogue and unity is an ongoing effort, not a completed goal. Predictably, different actors have employed the term in somewhat different ways.

The Djibouti accord itself was long in gestation – initially brokered in June 2008, it was only signed in August and implemented in early 2009. The key provisions of the accord included the following:

- declaration of cessation of hostilities;
- request to the government of Ethiopia to withdraw its forces from Somalia;
- establishment of joint security committee and patrols;
- creation of an expanded, unity parliament and formation of a new government.

Throughout the latter part of 2008 it was not at all clear that the accord would hold. The security situation on the ground in south-central Somalia was deteriorating, with Shabaab and other hardline Islamist groups continuing to make advances. The Yusuf wing of the TFG was violently opposed to the accord and declared it non-binding. And few were certain that Ethiopia would actually withdraw its forces. The ability to deliver on the promise of an Ethiopian withdrawal was key to the credibility of the moderates in the Djibouti talks.

The Ethiopian government played a decisive role in moving the Djibouti accord forward. It sought an honourable withdrawal from Somalia, and concluded that the TFG stood no chance of surviving unless moderate opposition elements were brought in. It saw the Djibouti accord as the most promising vehicle to achieve both of these objectives. To that end, it placed heavy pressure on the Yusuf wing of the TFG to embrace the accord, and when this failed it pressured Yusuf to resign, clearing the way for the formation of a new government. Finally, Ethiopia made good on its promise to withdraw, pulling its remaining troops out of the country in December 2008.

3.2 Reshaped Transitional Federal Government

The Ethiopian withdrawal and Yusuf's resignation in December 2008 placed severe time pressures on the Djibouti process actors to accelerate formation of a new government. The fear was that Shabaab and other Islamist insurgents would exploit the temporary "security vacuum" left by the departing Ethiopians and a TFG in suspended animation to launch an offensive and take the capital. That turned out not to be a major risk, as clan-based militias allied with the ARS resisted Shabaab advances. Still, pressure to form a new government was very strong. The first task was to bring the opposition into parliament. Rather than risk the political fallout of replacing some existing MPs to make space for the opposition, the signatories to the Djibouti accord agreed instead to the unwieldy but politically expedient option to double the size of the parliament to 550 MPs, with 200 new seats allocated to the ARS-Djibouti and 75 reserved for civil society representatives and other opposition groups. The ARS-Djibouti leadership met in January 2009 and, with little consultation with key constituencies inside Somalia, named MPs to the enlarged parliament. This gambit risked alienating important militia, civic, clan, and business leaders. Once the enlarged parliament was more or less formed, it voted on a new president. Nine nominees were considered; Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a co-leader of the ARS and former leader of the ICU in 2006, was selected. He then began the process of selecting a new prime minister and cabinet. Sharif's selection was not universally popular, even among his ARS-Djibouti group. But his selection has not been met with widespread rejection, except among the Islamist insurgents. Importantly, key external actors, including Ethiopia and the United States, found his selection unobjectionable. Likewise, the autonomous state of Puntland – home of former President Abdullahi Yusuf – did not reject the outcome.

By late February 2009, the reconfiguration of the TFG was complete. On 13 February, President Sharif selected a new prime minister, Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke, to replace Hassan Hussein Nur Adde, the man with whom Sharif negotiated the Djibouti accord. The decision to replace Nur Adde was not driven by competition or animosity, but by clan calculus – both Nur Adde and Sheikh Sharif come from the same Hawiye clan-family, and

for the new government to present itself as “balanced” in terms of clan, a member of another clan-family must serve as prime minister. Sharmarke is from the Majerteen clan of the Darood clan-family, the same clan as former President Abdullahi Yusuf, and his selection was seen in part as a means of keeping Puntland in the TFG. The selection of Sharmarke was also seen “as a bridge between Islamists within the government and the international community”; Sharmarke is a Canadian citizen and long-time resident of the US.¹⁶

Within a week of his approval by the parliament, Sharmarke announced the new cabinet, composed of 36 individuals. The new cabinet conforms to the recent and disputed Somali practice of proportional allocation by clan (the “4.5 formula”), and is heavily dominated by Somali diaspora members (roughly 70% of the new government are believed to hold citizenship or residency rights abroad).¹⁷ This growing role of the diaspora in Somali political as well as economic and social life has been a trend for some time.

Politically, the cabinet reflects a strong presence of individuals with some affiliation with al-Islah. Al-Islah is a movement of political Islam in Somalia which is considered progressive and which is associated with a circle of well-educated professionals and businesspeople.¹⁸ As such, the cabinet is not the embodiment of a unity government, but was described by one observer as “ARS-Djibouti-plus”, suggesting that Sharif’s moderate wing of the old ARS was now in control of the government.¹⁹ Prime Minister Sharmarke has recognized this and has promised to “extend an olive branch to those outside the peace process”.²⁰ For the moment, however, the dominance of Sharif’s political wing in the new TFG has not triggered forceful negative responses from other movements, with one major exception – the coalition of hardline Islamist insurgents now calling themselves Hizbul Islamiyya, or Islamic Party. This coalition, however, fell apart in March 2009 over leadership and other disputes; at the time this report was finalized it was unclear if Hizbul Islamiyya would continue to exist.

The new cabinet initially won general approval of most Somali clans, though some were less satisfied than others. Initially the Marehan/Darood clan representatives objected to what they viewed as under-representation, prompting a minor cabinet re-shuffle. But the most important aspect of the new government is not allocation of positions in the cabinet, but its power base on the ground. On this count, the Sharif/Sharmarke administration relies heavily on a Mogadishu power base, with support from top political, social, and business leaders of the Hawiye, pivotal to their short-term success in consolidating control over the capital. Most of the clan militias, which have aligned themselves first with the ARS-Djibouti wing and now the new TFG, are from the Hawiye clan, and the prime minister made a point of reaching out to the important Hawiye traditional elders council to discuss security in the capital. As a short-term strategy, consolidating support from the Hawiye clan is unavoidable, as that clan now dominates Mogadishu. In the longer-term, the Sharif/Sharmarke administration will need to broaden its support base or risk defections from lineages that feel they are being marginalized.

¹⁶ Somali Prime Minister Sworn In, *BBC News*, 14 February 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7890872.stm> [accessed April 2009]

¹⁷ Somali civil society leader, Nairobi. Correspondence, February 2009

¹⁸ Le Sage, A., *Somalia and the War on Terrorism: Political Islamic Movements and US Counter-Terrorism Efforts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University, June 2004, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, pp. 150-83

¹⁹ UN official, Nairobi. Personal interview, 2 March 2009

²⁰ Somali Prime Minister Sworn In

Having formed a cabinet and relocated to Mogadishu from Djibouti, the TFG's principal short-term policy challenges are security and reconciliation. The government enjoys informal authority over some territory in Mogadishu and in rural areas by dint of its alliances with clans, but it has little direct control over any territory. It faces a serious security threat from several hardline Islamist militias, which have launched offensives against pro-government and AMISOM forces in the capital. Most of the government's energies are likely to be devoted to building up a stronger military force, both directly – through recruitment into a national army – and indirectly, through continued reliance on local militias. Considerable energy will also be directed at negotiations with groups outside the government, in the hope that accommodation can be reached with many or most of the Islamist insurgents currently opposing the government. Yet the TFG must also focus on its primary responsibility, advancing the political transition. The TFG has extended its five-year mandate (set to expire in August 2009) for two years, during which time it faces daunting transitional tasks.

In the meantime, most communities in south-central Somalia are living in a state of continued state collapse, relying on customary law and armed deterrence to provide a semblance of public order and household safety. In its first policy moves, the Sharif/Sharmarke government has sought to accommodate the hardline Islamic insurgency by acceding to one of their demands, the application of *shari'a* law. More traditional clerics had been urging this as well. Precisely how *shari'a* will be used as a basis of law will be the subject of lengthy deliberation and could produce a wide range of legal outcomes. The president and prime minister have also sought to engage both clan elders and religious clerics as facilitators of communication with the insurgents.

The new TFG has received international support and pledges of aid from foreign donors.

3.3 State of Civil Society

Most observers concur that Somali civil society is instrumental for sustainable reconciliation and rebuilding of governance in Somalia. Civil society figures have also played crucial roles in pressuring all sides in the conflict to respect human rights. For humanitarian and development aid agencies, Somali civil society has also been an essential local partner for implementation of projects and delivery of emergency relief.²¹

The past two years of strife have had devastating effects on civil society. Targeted assassinations, threats, and general insecurity forced most of the professional and civic leadership in Mogadishu to flee abroad or to Hargeisa. Civic leaders who had learned to navigate the dangers of life in Somalia through 2006 were unable to cope with the fact that they were being targeted by both sides in the violence, making Mogadishu more unpredictable than at any time since 1992.²²

The loss of much of the Somali civic leadership has had significant impact on aid agencies, which in many cases have had to pull national staff out of the country and have found local partner organizations temporarily operating at partial capacity. The new political dispensation in Somalia since December 2008 has raised hopes that the security environment will improve,

²¹ Menkhaus, K. [et al.], *Somali Civil Society: Peace-Building in a Collapsed State*, in T. Paffenholz (ed.), *Civil Society and Peace-Building: A Critical Assessment*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, fc. 2009

²² Desperate Exodus: Somali Civil Society in Peril, *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, August 2008, pp. 2-3, http://www.life-peace.org/sajt/filer/pdf/Horn_of_Africa_Bulletin/HAB0808.pdf [accessed April 2009]

allowing civic leaders to return to work, but as of March 2009 Somali civil society figures report that it is still very dangerous for them.²³

4 Armed Actors in Somalia

4.1 Insurgencies

Somalia is replete with violent non-state actors operating either independently of the TFG or in a very loose affiliation with it. Most clans can muster a militia at short notice; most businesses possess private security forces; some municipal and regional polities possess paid security forces; and armed criminal gangs are ubiquitous and now include pirates.

As of early 2009, only one category of armed group is actively opposing the TFG, the collection of Islamist movements which in late 2008 agreed to form a loose coalition known as Hizbul Islamiyya, an alliance on paper which failed to survive even three months before falling apart. No clan-based militias openly oppose the government, though several militia leaders with a past reputation as spoilers (or “warlords”) have regrouped inside Ethiopia and have the potential to re-emerge in Somali affairs.

Of the several Islamist militias in the now defunct Hizbul Islamiyya coalition, Shabaab, Ras Kamboni, and Jebiso are the most powerful, and of these Shabaab is clearly the strongest. These groups collectively control all of the territory of Lower and Middle Jubba, the southern portion of Gedo region (including Bardhere town), all of Bay and Bakool regions, and most of Lower Shabelle region. They also have an operational presence inside Mogadishu and in portions of central Somalia, and form part of networks in Puntland, Somaliland, and the wider region, including eastern Ethiopia.

Through 2007 and the first half of 2008, Shabaab focused on Ethiopian troops and the TFG. Since the May 2008 US missile attack on the Shabaab leader Aden Hashi Ayro, however, Shabaab has publicly vowed to attack all Western and UN aid workers and anyone, including Somali national officers, working with them. In late October 2008 Shabaab launched five synchronized suicide bombings against government, UN, and Ethiopian sites in Puntland and Somaliland. The UNDP office in Hargeisa was one of the sites hit. Twenty-nine people died, including two UN staff. This attack demonstrated that Shabaab possesses the capacity to indoctrinate numerous suicide bombers; plan and execute a sophisticated set of attacks simultaneously; and launch terrorist attacks far from south-central Somalia. As a result regional neighbours Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya were all put on alert that Shabaab possessed a capacity to extend its attacks into their territory as well.

It should be noted, however, that the Shabaab movement has been split on its approach to foreign aid staff, with some cells attacking them, others kidnapping them for ransom, and still others collaborating to ensure humanitarian aid flows are not disrupted. Throughout 2008 the WFP was able to maintain an understanding with local Shabaab units in Bay and Bakool regions to continue operations there, and in early 2009 reached an agreement with a Shabaab group in Middle Jubba.²⁴

²³ McCrummen, S., In Somalia, an Exodus of the Educated, *Washington Post*, 16 March 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/15/AR2009031502556.html> [accessed April 2009]

²⁴ Somalia: WFP Signs Agreement with Islamic Administration in Middle Jubba Region in South, *AllAfrica.com*, 3 March 2009, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200903030455.html> [accessed April 2009]

These Islamist groups have established local administrations in the areas they control, and as such are as much a form of rival administration to the TFG as a mere insurgency. The quality and ideological tendencies of these administrations vary, but in much of their territory they have imposed harsh forms of *shari'a* law.

As noted above, the new TFG leadership and the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces have thrown into question the objectives of the Islamist insurgencies, and this has cost them considerable public support. The armed Islamist groups currently opposing the TFG are justifying their attacks on a number of grounds. They claim the new TFG is just a puppet of Ethiopia and the West; and they have argued that they will fight until certain policies are changed (imposition of *shari'a* law, which the new TFG immediately agreed to in principle, and withdrawal of AMISOM forces, which remains a point of contention). Some Shabaab leaders appear interested in “shooting their way into talks” with the government to earn a seat in the administration, while others appear committed to overthrowing the TFG entirely and seizing power. This is just one of a number of fissures within a movement that has always struggled to maintain unity.

Though evidence points to a gradual weakening of the ideological appeal of and local support for Shabaab and other radical insurgencies, these movements – or at least hardline elements within these groups – will continue to pose a danger to efforts to build a national government. International aid agencies will continue to be an easy target for radical cells seeking to discredit and undermine governments in Mogadishu, Puntland, and Somaliland. In fact, the weakening of these groups is likely to increase their attempts to attack international targets either inside Somalia or in the region. A weaker Shabaab will also be more tempted to fuse with Al-Qaeda as a means of gaining more external support and reviving its fortunes.

4.2 Foreign Extremists

Until recently, the only terrorist movement targeting UN and other external actors in the Horn of Africa was the East Africa Al-Qaeda (EAAQ) cell, which was responsible for the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and the 2002 bombing of a hotel in Mombasa. The EAAQ cell, formed in the early 1990s, was composed mainly on non-natives to the Horn of Africa, and was active almost entirely in Kenya until 2002. Early efforts by EAAQ to penetrate Somalia and eastern Ethiopia and forge partnerships with the Islamist movement Al Ittihad al Islamiyya proved unsuccessful, and Somalia was for EAAQ as “non-permissive” an environment as it was for aid agencies.²⁵

Since 2002, however, the EAAQ cell has developed a growing partnership with militant Islamists in Somalia, especially Shabaab. Mogadishu has been used by the EAAQ cell as a temporary safe haven. In 2006, significant numbers of foreign *mujahadiin* joined the ICU in its fight against Ethiopia but were routed and were either killed, captured, or forced to flee. Today, it is not believed that large numbers of foreign extremists are based in Somalia, but evidence strongly suggests that Shabaab relies on some Al-Qaeda trainers and advisors, and receives funds from Al-Qaeda.

²⁵ Case Study: Somalia, in Combating Terrorism Center, *Al Qa'ida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa*, West Point: US Military Academy, 2007, pp. 29-46, <http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/aqII.asp> [accessed April 2009]

Non-Somali armed insurgencies opposing the Ethiopian government – the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) – have at times used Somalia as a base and training site, but have no reason to threaten international aid agencies.

Al-Qaeda leaders like Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden have implored followers to support Shabaab in Somalia and have framed the Somali crisis as part of a worldwide Islamic liberation struggle. In March 2009, bin Laden issued an 11 minute video-tape message to his followers exhorting them to support the Somali jihad against the new government of Sheikh Sharif, which he condemned for having cooperated with the apostate West.²⁶ In reality Al-Qaeda appears to be interested only in dabbling in Somalia. There is no evidence it plans to turn Somalia into a new Al-Qaeda base along the lines of northern Pakistan or Afghanistan, and Al-Qaeda's support of Shabaab has not been accompanied by legions of *mujahadiin*. Al-Qaeda appears to be using Shabaab as a low cost, high yield irritant and threat to US and allied interests in the region. For UN agencies, however, the fact that Al-Qaeda considers the UN an arm of the US makes the presence of Al-Qaeda in Somalia dangerous. Unlike Shabaab, which is mainly focused on a local agenda and must consider the impact of its action on Somali community interests, Al-Qaeda's agenda is global and would be largely indifferent to the reaction of local Somalis to an attack on external aid agencies in Somalia or elsewhere in the Horn of Africa.

A new form of foreign extremist presence has recently emerged with the recruitment by Shabaab of a dozen or so Somali-Americans, one of whom served as a suicide bomber in Hargeisa. Though the number of these recruits holding foreign citizenship and passports is believed to be low, this development has created new security concerns in the region since Somalis holding citizenship abroad are able to move more freely and could gain access to sites for purposes of terrorist attacks.

4.3 Ethiopian Forces

The Ethiopian National Defence Force pulled its remaining 2,500 soldiers out of Somalia in December 2008, ending a two year military occupation intended to oust the ICU from power and support the TFG as the national government. The occupation did not, at least in the short term, achieve its objectives, and in fact arguably left Ethiopia and its Somali allies worse off than before. Whether it produces outcomes in the longer term that serve Ethiopia's interests remains to be seen.

Ethiopian forces remain assembled in significant numbers along the border with Somalia, and could be used in brief forays into Somalia if security concerns dictate. It is very unlikely that Ethiopia would attempt another prolonged occupation of territory inside Somalia, however. Ethiopia's approach now appears to be to work through local Somali actors, both within and outside the new TFG, to advance its objectives of weakening and defeating the Shabaab.

4.4 AMISOM

The African Union Mission in Somalia is a UN Security Council authorized Chapter VII peacekeeping force with a broad mandate focused primarily on protection of key TFG installations in Mogadishu. Though envisioned as an 8,000 strong force, AMISOM has only deployed between 2,000 and 3,000 troops, from Uganda and Burundi. It has never been in a

²⁶ Associated Press, Somali Clerics Reject Bin Laden Call, 20 March 2009, http://www.boston.com/news/world/africa/articles/2009/03/20/somali_clerics_reject_bin_laden_call/ [accessed April 2009]

position to fulfill much of its mandate, including “to contribute, as may be requested and within capabilities, to the creation of the necessary security conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance”.²⁷

There were fears in late 2008 that AMISOM forces would not be able to maintain their positions in Mogadishu with the final withdrawal of Ethiopian forces. Despite numerous insurgency attacks on AMISOM, however, they have been able to hold their own.

The Islamist insurgents have made one of their key demands the immediate withdrawal of AMISOM, claiming that the force is not needed, is an infringement on Somali sovereignty, and represents the continued oppression of Somali Muslims by “infidels”. “This is our land and you are non-believers”, warned Shabaab in a website-based threat to AMISOM.²⁸ In reality, the insurgents hope to drive AMISOM out in order to weaken the TFG and because they fear that AMISOM will be replaced by a large UN force in the future. The insurgents’ pre-occupation with AMISOM forces is also a reflection of their hope to generate public support by exploiting anti-foreigner sentiment. The insurgency has intentionally sought to draw AMISOM forces into armed exchanges in heavily populated areas, leading to several instances of AMISOM retaliatory strikes killing civilians and inflaming public opinion against their continued presence. On 22 February 2009, Shabaab launched its most audacious attack against AMISOM, using two local contractors working for AMISOM as suicide bombers in explosions which killed 11 Burundians and wounded 15.²⁹ This did not, however, prevent the African Union from extending the mandate of AMISOM for three months.³⁰ Indeed, despite admonitions from local religious and clan authorities, AMISOM increased its troop size in Mogadishu in early 2009.

One of the most important roles AMISOM plays at present is controlling key installations such as the Mogadishu seaport and airport. Were AMISOM to withdraw, these would almost certainly become sites over which heavy fighting would break out, posing a risk to the TFG, the capital, and the flow of commerce and food aid into the country.

5 Current Humanitarian Crisis

5.1 Humanitarian Needs Assessments

Somalia remains the site of the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other aid groups estimate that 3.2 million people out of a total population of about 8 million are highly or extremely food insecure and in need of emergency assistance in 2009. Of these 1.3 million are internally displaced and at special risk as they have lost their livelihoods, and are dependent on support from kinsmen or

²⁷ United Nations, Security Council, On the Political Process in Somalia and Establishment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), S/Res/1744 (2007), 20 February 2007

²⁸ Reuters, Somalia’s Shabaab Threatens More Attacks on African Troops, 23 February 2009, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/ASAZ-7PJDNA?OpenDocument&rc=1&cc=som> [accessed April 2009]

²⁹ Reuters, Insurgents Kill 11 Peacekeepers in Somalia, 22 February 2009, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/SNAA-7PJ2NR?OpenDocument&rc=1&cc=som> [accessed April 2009]

³⁰ Reuters, AU Peacekeepers to Stay On in Somalia 3 More Months, 11 March 2009, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/SNAA-7Q377S?OpenDocument&rc=1&cc=som> [accessed April 2009]

remittances from family members abroad. Prices of basic foodstuffs have soared due to disruption of commercial traffic, global spikes in food and fuel prices, and hyperinflation caused by counterfeiting of Somali shillings.³¹ Adding to the crisis is the fact that humanitarian access is extremely constrained by violence directed at aid agency personnel. This combination of extremely urgent humanitarian needs, disrupted livelihoods, rising prices, and poor access has made Somalia an exceptionally challenging and dangerous emergency.

Drought will have a major impact on the humanitarian situation in Somalia. The past year of low rainfall has already placed rural households in very serious jeopardy from southern Somalia to Puntland. If predictions of low or failed rains in the coming *gu* rainy season (April-June) turn out to be accurate, the countryside will face potentially catastrophic consequences, in a situation where local coping mechanisms have already been stretched.

The 2007 displacement of 700,000 Somalis from Mogadishu into the countryside, in a context of very limited humanitarian access, initially triggered fears of a humanitarian crisis so severe that famine could not be ruled out. Concerns that conditions in south-central Somalia could slip from a state of severe food insecurity into famine have regularly been repeated by worried aid officials, though usually privately, not in public statements.

5.2 Local Coping Mechanisms

Yet to date the humanitarian crisis in south-central Somalia continues to hover in the “highly or severely food insecure” range. Households – especially the 1.3 million internally displaced persons – have found ways to successfully cope with the crisis. Several factors appear to have helped to prevent the current situation from degenerating into a 1991 style famine. First, the extraordinary coping mechanisms of pastoral households is often underestimated by outsiders. Pastoralists are able to subsist off their herds as long as their mobility is not badly impeded and pasture is not completely exhausted. Second, at least some food aid is still getting through despite the extraordinary challenges of access. The latest figures from UN OCHA claim that in February 2009 food aid delivered mainly through the WFP reached 1.7 million beneficiaries out of the 3.2 million in need.³² Even if this figure is inflated, and even if a significant proportion of food aid is being diverted, the fact that tons of food aid is entering the market in south-central Somalia improves availability and drops food prices. Third, Somalia in 2009 benefits from the extensive remittance economy, an economy that was only embryonic in the 1991-1992 famine. At least some of the urban displaced (the proportion is unknown, but probably no more than 20-30 percent) receive remittances from relatives abroad, allowing them to purchase basic foodstuffs. Fourth, many of the IDPs from Mogadishu fled to areas of the country where their clan predominates, and so have been able to call upon lineage obligations for assistance. This has created a serious dependency burden on rural pastoral and farming families, but has been a factor in keeping households from complete destitution. Finally, reports from sites of displacement suggest that households are cutting back on the number of meals they take and other measures intended to weather the storm.

³¹ United States Agency for International Development, *Somalia Food Security Update*, March 2009, p. 2, http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/somalia_2009_03_final.pdf [accessed April 2009]

³² United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Somalia: Food Aid Distributions (February 2009)*, March 2009, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Af.nsf/tuFullMap/362188B2D4976BC7C125757B0037E2DB/\\$File/map.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/fullMaps_Af.nsf/tuFullMap/362188B2D4976BC7C125757B0037E2DB/$File/map.pdf?OpenElement) [accessed April 2009]

The critical question has been: at what point will these coping mechanisms be strained to the breaking point? Fears of a “tipping point” in the humanitarian crisis have recently been raised because of two new pressures. First, much of Somalia has been hit hard by a drought, which is now so severe that herds are reportedly dying in large numbers.³³ The drought is expected to produce below normal rainfall in the main *gu* rainy season from April through June. If so, rural households will be even less able to support the displaced and will themselves require emergency aid. Second, the global economic crisis is already producing a noticeable decline in remittances transferred by the Somali diaspora back to Somalia. One report, drawing on interviews with remittance companies, contends that remittances have dropped on average between five and eight percent for several consecutive months, with a ten percent decrease in February 2009 alone.³⁴

One factor that may reduce somewhat pressures on rural households is the projected return of urban IDPs to Mogadishu in the event that security conditions improve there.

5.3 Humanitarian Access and Security Management

Despite the extremely high humanitarian casualty rates in Somalia, the UN has not to date suspended operations entirely in the country. The UN’s higher threshold for humanitarian casualties in Somalia compared to other crisis zones has been the source of discussion within the aid community. The severity and scope of the humanitarian crisis in the country is a partial explanation; the WFP in particular has worked very hard to maintain the flow of at least some food aid into the country, despite suffering five fatalities to its staff in 2008 and three more in the first three months of 2009.³⁵ In addition, at times the humanitarian community has been under political pressure to maintain an operational presence in the country to shore up the TFG. The latter has been a source of tensions and controversy.

Security concerns were elevated in the aftermath of the Shabaab terrorist bombings in October 2008, especially because one of the five target sites was a UN compound. International staff of UN agencies and NGOs have generally been restricted to short site visits, and in small numbers. The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) has set sharp limits on the total number of UN staff per location in order to ensure viable evacuation by air should that prove necessary. National staff have shouldered responsibilities for day to day operations and have endured the high security risks.

Many of the security incidents that have cost the lives of humanitarian aid workers in Somalia since 2007 remain unsolved, and considerable uncertainty exists over the source of the attacks. At least a few are clearly linked to Shabaab, but Shabaab’s relationship to aid agencies is in fact complex. In some cases Shabaab leaders and militia have actually

³³ United States Agency for International Development, *Somalia Food Security Update*; United Nations, Integrated Regional Information Networks, Somalia: Once the Camels Start Dying, People Are Not Far Behind, Nairobi, 10 March 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83397> [accessed April 2009]

³⁴ United States Agency for International Development, *Somalia Food Security Update*

³⁵ WFP Demands Safety for Staff in South and Central Somalia, *Medical News Today*, 22 January 2009, <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/136359.php> [accessed April 2009]; Shabelle Media Network, Somalia: WFP Contractor Killed in Mogadishu, Mogadishu, 19 March 2009, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200903190330.html> [accessed April 2009]

intervened to secure the release of kidnapped aid personnel.³⁶ TFG militia under the old leadership of Abdullahi Yusuf were suspected of some assassinations of aid workers as well. The new TFG leadership has pledged to provide security to aid agencies and to bring security forces under control. Finally, many security incidents are believed to be linked to clan militias and criminal gangs.

Humanitarian access in border areas of Kenya and Ethiopia where refugees from Somalia have fled has generally been good, though northern Kenya's border areas are generally insecure and are a site of activity by the Ras Kiamboni insurgency. Access to Ethiopian border areas have been restricted by the Ethiopian National Defence Forces due to its counter-insurgency operations in eastern Ethiopia. Aid workers in eastern Ethiopia's border areas with Somalia have occasionally been at risk of kidnapping by Somali armed groups who move them into Somalia.

6 Regional Impact

Virtually all of Somalia's neighbours are likely to be deeply preoccupied with serious internal political and economic challenges in the coming year or two, limiting their capacity to respond to spillover from Somalia. In a worst-case regional scenario, one or more of Somalia's neighbours, which to date have been important sites for refugee camps and humanitarian operations, become destabilized, imperilling aid flows to and safe havens for Somali refugees.

6.1 Kenya

Despite its official policy which has technically closed the border with Somalia, Kenya will continue to see refugee flows across its northern border, though the volume of refugees will vary depending on political outcomes in Somalia. In spite of very difficult conditions at Dabaab, Somali households which reach the refugee camps are unlikely to return quickly to Somalia, so crowded conditions in Dabaab will continue to be a pressing crisis and a source of ongoing negotiations between the government of Kenya and UNHCR over the establishment of new camps in the area to relieve congestion. The expansion of new camps will create tensions with local residents in the Dabaab area, who have hosted one of the world's largest concentrations of refugees for almost 20 years. At present, pushback from political leaders in northeast Kenya is blocking plans for new camp openings, and instead proposals are being floated to relocate some of the Somali refugees to Kakuma camp near the Sudanese border.³⁷ A percentage of the refugees will find their way to Garissa, the Eastleigh neighbourhood of Nairobi, or Mombasa, adding to the growing number of Somalis taking up residence in these cities.

Cross-border crime and political tensions in border towns like Mandera and El Waq will remain acute thanks to political turbulence and the presence of radical Islamists on the Somali side of the border. Kenya's biggest security concern will unquestionably be the threat of a terrorist attack on a soft target in Kenya conducted or facilitated by Shabaab. To date most of Kenya's 400,000 or so ethnic Somalis have been uninterested in involving themselves in

³⁶ United Nations, Integrated Regional Information Networks, Somalia: Abducted UN Staff Released Unharmed, Nairobi, 17 March 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83513> [accessed April 2009]

³⁷ Xinhua News Agency, UNHCR Bid to Relocate Somali Refugees Hits Snag in Kenya, Nairobi, 26 March 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/26/content_11077034.htm [accessed April 2009]

Somali internal politics, but a fraction are believed to have been recruited into Shabaab and the Ras Kiamboni group, and could pose a security problem for Kenya. In the event that Kenya faces renewed political crises related to unresolved tensions from the December 2007 election, northeast Kenya is likely to remain unaffected, as was the case in early 2008. But a return of serious political destabilization in Kenya as a whole would badly disrupt the capacity of Nairobi-based aid agencies to serve refugee populations in Dabaab.

6.2 Yemen

Yemen is directly affected by the Somali crisis in multiple ways, and will continue to have to manage this spillover into the future. Somali refugee flows, via dangerous boat journeys from Puntland orchestrated by rings of human smugglers, will add to the large number of Somali refugees already in Yemen. Yemen saw a very considerable spike in refugee flows from Somalia in 2007 and 2008, during the height of the insurgency violence and displacement in Mogadishu. UNHCR estimated in late 2008 that 129,000 African refugees, mainly Somali, were residing in Yemen, though the actual number may be much higher.³⁸

Yemen is also affected by the epidemic of Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Most Somali piracy attacks occur in or near Yemen territorial waters, and have badly disrupted shipping trade in Yemen.

Of concern to humanitarian aid agencies seeking to assist Somali refugees in Yemen is the prospect of serious political and economic deterioration in Yemen itself. The country currently faces the threat of renewed insurgency in both the north and south, as well as profound economic deterioration and resource scarcity.³⁹ Were the country to slip into serious levels of civil strife and economic collapse, Somali refugees there would be trapped.

6.3 Ethiopia

Ethiopia has powerful interests in the outcome in Somalia, and is the most assertive government in the region in seeking to shape those outcomes. It is considered unlikely that Ethiopia will respond to political deterioration in Somalia with another large-scale troop deployment into the country, but Ethiopia will certainly continue to use local proxies to block developments it considers a threat to its security, and it may engage in short forays into Somalia with its own forces. At present the government of Ethiopia appears to support the new TFG as well as the armed resistance to Shabaab by clan militias. Ethiopian security today is threatened both by the danger of radical Islamist control of southern Somalia and by the infiltration of Shabaab into eastern Ethiopia, where it seeks to launch terrorist attacks against Ethiopia. There is reason to believe that the weaker Shabaab becomes in the Somali political arena the more likely it will be to hit Ethiopia with a terrorist attack in the hope of drawing Ethiopia back into Somalia.

Refugee flows from Somalia into Ethiopia are more likely in 2009 than in 2007 and 2008, in part because humanitarian conditions inside Somalia are worsening, and in part because Somalis who collaborated with Ethiopia in 2007-2008 may seek asylum there. Ethiopia will be more supportive of opening refugee camps for Somalis now than in the past for political

³⁸ Al-Hilaly, K., Somali Refugees in Yemen on the Rise, *Yemen Times*, 8 October 2008, <http://www.yementimes.com/article.shtml?i=1197&p=local&a=3> [accessed April 2009]

³⁹ Hill, G., *Yemen: Fear of Failure*, London: Chatham House, November 2008, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/12576_bp1108yemen.pdf [accessed April 2009]

reasons – whereas in 2007 and 2008 a refugee flow would have indicated a failure of the Ethiopian occupation, today it would tend to vindicate Ethiopia in the aftermath of its withdrawal.

There are persistent rumours that several Somali militia leaders with close links to the government of Ethiopia have been assembled in the Dolo area, where Ethiopia is currently said to be keeping them contained, in order to avoid disrupting the new TFG. In the event that Ethiopia sees fit to use these local proxies inside Somalia, however, the presence of the Somali militias close to the proposed refugee camp in Dolo could become problematic for aid agencies.

In a worst case scenario in Somalia, Ethiopia will see a significant increase in refugees, but only those looking to cross the nearest border for security and access to aid. Unlike Yemen, Kenya, and Djibouti, Ethiopia does not serve as a useful transit point for Somalis seeking to move to a third country.

Because the Ethiopian border area is closer and easier to reach for much of the population of south-central Somalia than any other border, any programme providing humanitarian assistance to Somali refugees on the Ethiopian border is more likely to attract Somalis. As the recent joint assessment of Dolo noted, there is evidence that thousands of Somali households just across the border are waiting to cross into Ethiopia as soon as aid facilities are established there.⁴⁰

6.4 Djibouti

Djibouti has come to play a critical role as diplomatic hub for Somalia, as well as an emerging site for Somali businesspeople. Steady flows of Somali refugees into Djibouti can be expected regardless of political outcome in Somalia, as Djibouti serves as a viable transit point for Somalis seeking to reach Yemen. As with Kenya and Ethiopia, Djibouti is a potential target of Shabaab or other jihadist terrorist attacks due to its close relationship with the US Combined Joint Task Force, which has its base in Camp Lemonier in Djibouti.

6.5 Eritrea

Eritrea has successfully used the crisis in Somalia to wage a proxy war against Ethiopia. In 2007 and 2008 its support to Shabaab was low cost for Eritrea while imposing high costs on Ethiopia. This equation has changed in 2009 however. Eritrea's continued support to Shabaab now presents itself to the Somali people as the actions of an external spoiler, and risks isolating Eritrea still further in the international diplomatic community. If a more comprehensive diplomatic approach to the Horn of Africa's interlocked conflicts is attempted, Eritrea could well be offered an opportunity to take a more constructive approach to Somalia, which historically has been close to Eritrea. Eritrea's profound internal crises – including major food shortages, economic decay, and political tensions – may lead the Eritrean government to reduce its support to Somali insurgents. There are no prospects for Somali refugee movements into Eritrea.

⁴⁰ Humanitarian Response Fund Ethiopia, unpublished assessment, Dolo Ado Mission, 12 March 2009

7 Conclusions

7.1 Outlook for (South and Central) Somalia

In the aftermath of the dramatic political changes in late 2008 and early 2009, south-central Somalia is at a crossroads, with three likely scenarios. As with all scenarios, these are broad-brush descriptions; there are various permutations on each theme.

Best-case scenario: gradual success of the Djibouti process. In a best-case outcome, the key features of the Djibouti process – an agreement to build a broad-based transitional government, seek negotiated settlements of disputes to the extent possible, and embrace a moderate form of political Islamic governance that does not threaten regional stability – succeed in gradually ending the long period of armed conflict and state collapse in the country. The new TFG or a successor government will negotiate with parts of the armed insurgency, effectively isolating and weakening the hardliners whose ability to disrupt and attack will gradually be diminished, and who find they have little public support among war-weary Somalis. The TFG will successfully draw upon elements of the old ICU governing arrangements, including *shari'a* courts, and its civic and business support to re-establish public order in Mogadishu and south-central Somalia. Improved security will allow internally displaced persons to return home and commercial and productive activities to resume, ushering in a period of gradual recovery. The TFG will also advance key transitional tasks, leading to a new constitution and elections.

Even in this best-case outcome, it is important to anticipate crises and setbacks in what is a very difficult political environment. Spoilers will not be easily eliminated, and will likely select external aid agencies as convenient soft targets to embarrass the new government. For humanitarian and development agencies, even rapid political improvement will only yield incremental improvement in humanitarian access, livelihoods, and food security, all of which will remain major challenges in coming years. In fact, rapid improvement in security and governance could create a new humanitarian challenge, namely a sudden, large-scale movement of returnees to homes that are damaged or destroyed and livelihoods that are no longer viable. This “Kosovo” scenario of rapid, large-scale, spontaneous return of populations displaced by war should be the basis for contingency planning. Likewise, all UN agencies should be prepared to transition from operating largely independently of a national government to partnering with a government that may be well-intentioned but initially very weak in capacity. Finally, if a best-case scenario holds and security improves, UN agencies will need contingency plans in place for gradual relocation to Mogadishu.

Worst-case scenario: collapse of the TFG, consolidation of power by Islamic extremists. In this outcome, the weak TFG is unable to hold together a viable coalition and is overrun by better-armed, better-motivated, Al-Qaeda-backed Hizbul Islamiyya, which consolidates control over most or all of south-central Somalia and threatens to destabilize Puntland and Somaliland. The movement declares itself the new government, imposes harsh forms of *shari'a* law, and embraces external policies that suggest continued close links to Al-Qaeda and that pose a direct threat to regional states. UN and other aid agencies are either unwelcome in this context or are confronted with policy demands that make it very difficult to operate. Hostile response from neighbouring Ethiopia, the US, and others will either produce direct intervention in the country or a surge in proxy wars; either way, this scenario is very likely to yield high levels of armed conflict and insecurity, promoting still more displacement and the prospect of humanitarian crisis even greater than at present. Refugee flows will in this instance almost certainly increase in every direction.

“Status quo ante” scenario: return to state collapse and militia fiefdoms. A third scenario has the TFG fail to become operational and maintain a cohesive alliance, but armed insurgents are also unable to consolidate control over the capital, and the country reverts to a familiar state of collapsed authority in which a mixture of Islamist groups, clan militias, municipalities, and warlord fiefdoms exercise some level of control over pockets of territory and neighbourhoods in Mogadishu. This scenario is in some measure easiest to predict as the most likely outcome because it is essentially a description of the current state of affairs in the country already. Armed clashes and insecurity will be chronic in this instance, especially in flashpoints of disputed territory. Likewise, pockets of relative calm will exist in fiefdoms effectively controlled by responsible authorities. Aid agencies will be required to negotiate access on a micro-level, village by village, in much the same way they have done in recent years. This scenario is one of an operating environment which is generally non-permissive, unstable, and very complex, but familiar and somewhat predictable to aid agency personnel with long experience in the country.

7.2 Outlook for Puntland

The autonomous, non-secessionist state of Puntland in northeast Somalia experienced an alarming deterioration in its security and political stability over the past two years. This was due in large part to the diversion of much of the customs revenue from the seaport of Bosaso to the coffers of the TFG, which was led by former Puntland President Abdullahi Yusuf. Puntland authorities were unable to pay salaries to security forces, who turned to crime and kidnapping for ransom. Rampant counterfeiting created hyperinflation, throwing the local economy into chaos. The entire region fell into a state of serious insecurity.⁴¹ Almost all aid agency personnel were pulled out of the region by late 2008, mainly because of the threat of criminal violence and kidnapping. The Shabaab suicide bombings in Puntland in October 2008 added to a sense of collapsing public security.

Fortunately, the region appears to be stepping back from the brink of political collapse. Elections in the Puntland parliament in January 2009 produced a new government, led by President Abdirahman Mohamed Farole, which has taken steps to reassert control over crime, corruption, and piracy.

Equally important, Puntland has signalled its intent to respect the outcome of the change in administration in Mogadishu, despite initial fears that it might declare its autonomy from the new TFG following Yusuf’s resignation. TFG President Sharif made a point of reaching out to keep Puntland in the fold by naming Sharmarke, whose Majerteen clan is dominant in Puntland, as prime minister. Though its political relations with south-central Somalia have been strained by the changes in the TFG, Puntland remains closely integrated into the economy of southern Somalia, for which it is an important commercial artery (via Bosaso port).

Puntland remains the site of the world’s worst piracy epidemic, and global efforts to combat piracy off the Puntland coast currently dominate the region’s external relations. Incidents of piracy have steadily escalated since the late 1990s, but exploded in 2007. In the first eight months of 2008, 60 ships had been pirated off the coast of Somalia, both along the Indian

⁴¹ Weinstein, M., The Puntland State of Somalia Comes into Play, *PINR: Power and Interest News Report*, 2 August 2007, http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=670&language_id=1 [accessed April 2009]

Ocean and increasingly in the key shipping land of the Gulf of Aden.⁴² Though the pirates involved in these attacks come from all over Somalia, and though the financial backers of the pirate operations are equally national in scope, the pirate coves are concentrated in Puntland and much or most of the ransoms collected (estimated at between US\$ 20 and US\$ 40 million in 2008) remain in the hands of Puntlanders. High end real estate developments in Puntland's major cities attest to the fact that piracy ransoms are fuelling a lucrative economy there. It is widely believed that top Puntland political and business figures are implicated, raising questions about how the new Puntland government will be able to combat piracy when so many local beneficiaries have a stake in perpetuating it. A major international naval task force, composed of over a dozen different countries, is now patrolling the waters off Puntland, successfully reducing though not eliminating piracy attacks in those vast waters.⁴³

Puntland authorities cooperate with Ethiopia and the United States in counter-terrorism monitoring, a fact which makes Puntland government officials and installations attractive targets for Shabaab attacks and assassinations. Puntland has also assisted Ethiopia in operations to apprehend members of the Ogaden National Liberation Front, raising tensions with that Ethiopia-based insurgency as well.

Puntland remains in a protracted armed stand-off with neighbouring Somaliland over control of disputed territory in parts of Sool and Sanaag regions. The two polities engaged in a series of armed clashes over the territories between 2005 and 2008. The fact that parts of Sool and Sanaag are sites of known natural gas and oil reserves has increased the stakes. Puntland is presently not in control of the main town Las Anod, and is not in a strong position to retake it. Somaliland elections now likely in June 2009 will increase tension between Puntland and Somaliland, if Somaliland authorities attempt to establish polling stations in the disputed territories.

7.3 Outlook for Somaliland

Somaliland was badly shaken by the Shabaab suicide bombing attacks there in late October 2008, which left 30 dead, including two UN staff. The attack led to the evacuation of most aid personnel, and damaged confidence inside Somaliland, which until that point had largely escaped the violence emanating from southern Somalia. Tens of thousands of southern Somalis reside in Somaliland as a refuge from the fighting in Mogadishu, and many initially reported fears of retaliation or deportation. But no such measures were taken against the displaced southerners.

At present, the dominant political issue in Somaliland is the upcoming elections, now postponed until June 2009 or even later. The postponement was due to delays in voter registration and other organizational obstacles, including the untimely death in March of the newly appointed head of the voter registration process. A new date for the elections cannot be set until all parties, donors, and the National Electoral Commission reach a consensus on the date. That has not occurred, as one political party, Kulmiye, is demanding that an interim caretaker government be established upon the expiration of the term of the current government. Uncertainty over the election date will likely prevail for several months.

⁴² Middleton, R., *Piracy in Somalia: Threatening Global Trade, Feeding Local Wars*, London: Chatham House, October 2008, p. 3, http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/12203_1008piracysomalia.pdf [accessed April 2009]

⁴³ Menkhaus, K., *Dangerous Waters, Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 51, No 1, February-March 2009, pp. 21-5; Ryu, A., *Somali Pirates Slowed, But Not Stopped by International Effort*, *VOA News*, 12 March 2009, <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-03-12-voa43.cfm> [accessed April 2009]

The election itself is expected to be closely contested but is not likely to be a source of destabilization or political violence.

7.4 Outlook for Refugee and IDP Flows into 2009

An estimated 100,000 Somalis sought asylum in 2008 in neighbouring countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Djibouti, adding to the total of 438,000 Somali refugees officially in asylum countries. Depending on political conditions in Somalia, the year 2009 could match that outflow of refugees.

Population movements associated with the crisis have been confused, as Somali households react to cross-cutting trends, contradictory information, and a mixture of “push” and “pull” factors. On the one hand, the departure of Ethiopian forces and the prospect of improved security in Mogadishu have produced a light but steady flow of IDPs back to the capital. An estimated 40,000 returnees have relocated to Mogadishu in 2009, despite ongoing insecurity, destroyed homes, and poor economic prospects.⁴⁴ Still others are expressing interest in returning to Mogadishu but lack the means to pay for the journey.⁴⁵ At the same time, the flow of refugees crossing into Kenya and Ethiopia has actually increased.⁴⁶ Asylum-seekers fleeing into Ethiopia at Dolo number 2,500, with as many as 5,000 people in nearby border areas who may cross and seek asylum once a camp is established and services provided, according to a recent assessment.⁴⁷ This set of refugees is expressing fear of persecution at the hands of Shabaab, and many appear to be households who had some association with the Ethiopian occupation and fear retaliation now that the Ethiopian forces have withdrawn. The flow of refugees into the three refugee camps comprising Dadaab is much greater. There, newly arrived refugees cite insecurity, drought, and food shortages as reasons for making the perilous journey to the Kenyan border.

Future movements of refugees and IDPs will depend in part on which political scenario unfolds in the coming year. In the worst-case scenario (TFG collapse, Shabaab advance, heavy fighting and external interventions, in a context of serious drought and declining purchasing power), renewed flight from Mogadishu will occur. Because of serious drought conditions in the interior of the country, and because insecurity is preventing emergency aid from reaching populations inside Somalia, those displaced will be much more inclined to take the risk of passage across a border to Kenya, Ethiopia, or Yemen, while many others will seek refuge in Somaliland. If emergency aid continues to be difficult to deliver inside Somalia, refugee camps and aid operations in border areas of Kenya and Ethiopia could inadvertently serve as major magnets for desperate populations. In this worst-case scenario, requests for political asylum from Somalis will spike based on claims of fear of persecution at the hands of radical Islamists. Such requests were already very high in 2008 – UNHCR reports Somali asylum requests increasing worldwide by 77 percent between 2007 and

⁴⁴ United Nations, Integrated Regional Information Networks, Somalia: IDPs Returning to ‘Risky’ Mogadishu, Nairobi, 5 March 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83308> [accessed April 2009]

⁴⁵ United Nations, Integrated Regional Information Networks, Somalia: Thousands Need Aid to Return Home from Somaliland, Hargeisa, 26 March 2009, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/ACIO-7QHHPT?OpenDocument&rc=1&cc=som> [accessed April 2009]

⁴⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Thousands of Somalis Continue to Flee to North-eastern Kenya

⁴⁷ Humanitarian Response Fund Ethiopia

2008.⁴⁸ Countries hosting existing Somali populations will see a significant increase in asylum claims, with asylum seekers claiming fear of political persecution at the hands of radical Islamists were they to be deported. This is likely to create special political problems for some European countries already struggling with large and poorly integrated Somali communities.

But even in a best case scenario, in which security and governance improves significantly in Mogadishu, it is likely that patterns of population movement will remain mixed. The apparent paradox of IDPs returning to Mogadishu even as others flee to Kenya is in part a matter of divergent risk assessments by families, but also possibly a matter of differing motives. Because households in Somalia remain so dependent on remittances from family members successfully relocated abroad, at least part of the outflow of Somalis to refugee camps will continue to be fuelled by the remittance imperative rather than conventional asylum-seeking. Meanwhile, IDPs are likely to return to Mogadishu gradually rather than in a large wave, though the possibility of a major spontaneous relocation cannot be ruled out and should be considered in contingency planning.

In a best-case scenario, the broader Somali diaspora (numbering about one million worldwide) will increase its political engagement and business investments in Somalia, activities that will increase its travel to and from Somalia. The “diasporization” of Somali society has meant that the main repository of the country’s professionals, political leaders, and investors is now abroad. The diaspora will unavoidably play a disproportionate role in any new government and economic recovery in the country. In the past this has typically involved mainly adult Somali males in the diaspora, who leave their families back in newly adopted countries. Given the high levels of uncertainty about Somalia’s future direction, it is very likely that families will be kept back in countries of resettlement for the foreseeable future even in a best-case outcome in Somalia.

The fear of political persecution by extremist Islamist movements in Somalia will fuel a rise of asylum claims by Somalis worldwide. In some cases these claims will be well-founded, in other instances opportunistic, but in either event they will constitute a much more compelling case for asylum than Somali asylum seekers have had in many years.

⁴⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Conflicts in Afghanistan and Somalia Fuel Increase in Asylum Seekers, Geneva, 24 March 2009 (press statement), <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/49c8a10d2.html> [accessed April 2009]

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