

Seminar report

# Seeking Peace in Somalia

A review of the impact of AMISOM police



Compiled by Timothy Walker and Phakamani Lisa / Edited by Sandra Oder  
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# Introduction

COLONEL (RTD) FESTUS ABOAGYE

The chair began proceedings by welcoming participants and noting that Somalia was at the time not a very popular topic for discussion because of events in North and West Africa. However, he observed that Somalia remains an important geopolitical and security concern

for the East African and Horn of Africa region and for the broader international community. Efforts to resolve the conflict in Somalia provide important lessons on how to deal with some of the ongoing conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East.

# Presentation

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT VANCE B GARIBA

Senior Police Advisor, Amisom Police

Chief Supt Gariba's presentation was entitled 'Seeking peace in Somalia: is failure a likely option for the AU Mission?' He began by giving a short account of his profile, mentioning that he was the outgoing senior police advisor to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) police commissioner and had previously served in the United Nations Mission in Liberia. He joined AMISOM in 2008 and continues to serve in the Ghana Police Service. He cautioned, however, that his presentation was not AMISOM's position, but rather a reflection of his own views.

Chief Supt Gariba situated his substantive presentation within Somalia's historical context, observing that the country enjoyed a very stable and democratic form of government following its independence in 1960. This, he said, changed in 1969 after the Somali government was succeeded by a military regime, and was compounded by the Cold War rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union over Somalia's strategic importance to the shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The intervening years saw Somalia descend into struggles for power that resulted in the ousting of President Siad Barre in 1991 and the subsequent insidious clan conflicts and political fragmentation that came to characterise the country. He pointed out that there have been a number of attempts to resolve the Somali conflict, notably the 2002 initiative by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) with the support of the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) that brought together representatives of warring factions and agreed in 2003 on a Transitional National Charter. This was followed in 2004 with the inauguration in Kenya of a 275-member Transitional Parliament that elected Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed as the new president of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The TFG was, however, bogged down by internal divisions and faced increasing opposition from the Islamic Courts Union

(ICU), an Islamist organisation that in 2006 took control of much of southern and central Somalia. The TFG only managed to drive out the ICU from Somalia in December 2006 with the support of Ethiopian forces backed by the United States. Efforts by the TFG and Ethiopian forces, however, to impose their authority on Somali territory were resisted by Mogadishu-based clan militias and Al Shabaab, i.e. remnants of the militant wing of the ICU. In 2008 the TFG signed an agreement with the moderate Islamist group known as the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) in Djibouti that also called for the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in exchange for the cessation of armed confrontation. Parliament was subsequently expanded to accommodate ARS members and then elected Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former ARS chairman, as the president of Somalia in January 2009.

## THE PEACEKEEPING MISSION: THE UNITED NATIONS (UN) AND THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)

Chief Supt Gariba observed that the OAU/AU and the international community have engaged with Somalia since 1991, although, he added, many of the engagements have been ineffective, false starts or outright failures. He said that in 2006 the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1725, which reiterated the UNSC's commitment to a comprehensive, broad-based representative and inclusive political process as envisaged in the Transitional Federal Charter. Furthermore, the UNSC, acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorised IGAD and the AU to establish a 'protection and training mission in Somalia'. UNSC Resolution 1744, passed on 20 February 2007, welcomed the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia, reiterated the UNSC's support for Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs)



and authorised the AU to establish a mission in Somalia. This paved the way for the deployment of AMISOM, in accordance with Resolution 1772, with Uganda and Burundi being the only countries that honoured the pledge to send troops to Somalia. AMISOM's task was to:

- Support dialogue and reconciliation in Somalia, working with all stakeholders
- Provide, as appropriate, protection to the TFIs and their key infrastructure to enable them carry out their functions
- Assist in the implementation of the National Security and Stabilisation Plan of Somalia, particularly the effective re-establishment and training of all-inclusive Somali security forces, bearing in mind the programmes already being implemented by some of Somalia's bilateral and multilateral partners
- Provide, within the mission's capabilities and as appropriate, technical and other support to the disarmament and stabilisation efforts
- Monitor the security situation in areas where its forces were deployed
- Facilitate, as may be required and within the mission's capabilities, humanitarian operations, including the repatriation and reintegration of refugees and the resettlement of internally displaced persons
- Protect its personnel, installations and equipment, including exercising its right of self-defence

Chief Supt Gariba stated that three aspects define AMISOM's role in Somalia: firstly, the political, diplomatic and civilian components operating under the special representative of the chairperson of the AU Commission on Somalia and backstopped by the AU Commission chairperson and the commissioner for peace and security; secondly, the role of the AU high representative for Somalia, former Ghanaian President Jerry John Rawlings, whose remit is to 'galvanize, both within and outside of the continent, increased support for efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in Somalia'; and, thirdly, the military aspect represented by troops from Uganda and Burundi.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

Chief Supt Gariba noted that the AU, with the support of the Italian government, has been running a capacity-building programme for various institutions of the Somali civil service, including key ministries and departments. The United States (US) and the European Union (EU) have also contributed substantially towards mitigating the food and humanitarian crises. He pointed out that international efforts have made a major contribution towards re-establishing institutions in Somalia, including

the rehabilitation of military recruits through training missions as well as the training and mentoring of 2 000 Somali police. However, he stated that the TFG and other TFIs have faced multiple challenges, including issues of shortage of resources, lack of effective coordination, accusations of corruption and the inability to deal with the scourge of piracy. The TFG in particular is riven with back-room dealings and rivalry among senior officials and has largely failed to gain legitimacy. Broadly, Chief Supt Gariba observed that the military and security situation remains extremely volatile and dangerous in south and central Somalia. The armed groups led by Al Shabaab and Hizbul Islam have not relented in their attacks against the TFG, the Somali population and AMISOM. He noted that neighbouring countries and the EU have helped train Transitional Federal Forces, but that desertions are very high due to a lack of clear command-and-control structures, equipment and payment, fuelled partly by corruption and the absence of accountability.

Touching on piracy, Chief Supt Gariba emphasised the need to continue with efforts to deal with it and for a more aggressive solution to the scourge. He also underscored the need to offer protection to journalists, humanitarian workers, women and children who continue to be targeted by militant groups. Here he shed light on the three polities that constitute Somalia: 1) the breakaway territory of Somaliland, which has been relatively stable and peaceful, but is not recognised as an independent state by the international community; 2) Puntland, another breakaway territory that remains a source of concern because it is the hub of Somali piracy activities; and 3) south and central Somalia, largely controlled by Al Shabaab, although the capital, Mogadishu, is now 60 per cent under the control of AMISOM forces.

## POLICE

Chief Supt Gariba stated that AMISOM has provided refresher courses to over 2 000 Somali police, and has trained 500 new recruits in Djibouti and 200 junior and middle-level managers in Kenya, while mentoring and advising at the airport police station is ongoing, with the reactivation of the I/24/7 communication equipment for the Somali Police Force.

In Chief Supt Gariba's view, failure is not a likely option for the AU mission, although it could be if the international community stops supporting both the AU and the people of Somalia. He concluded by pointing out that there is a need for the TFG, the AU and the international community to take some tough decisions regarding warfare against Al Shabaab and Hizbul Islam, the worsening poverty situation, and the problems within the TFG as a way of stabilising Somalia.

# Response

DR EMMANUEL KISIANGANI

Dr Kisiangani's response focused on a number of salient points raised by the key speaker. He first sought to clarify a number of issues, including the extension of the TFG's term of office (due to expire in August 2011) and that of Parliament by one and three years, respectively. This was a unilateral decision by the two institutions that has not gone down well with a number of international actors and sponsors, who increasingly perceive the TFG as self-serving and unable to consolidate peace. He then noted that AMISOM, despite its logistical, human capacity and funding challenges, has done relatively well by providing a few basic goods and services in Mogadishu, such as medication and street lighting. He added that in comparison to the previous TFG, whose president narrowly escaped numerous assassination attempts, the current president has not faced as many threats on his life and this was testimony to AMISOM's efforts. In spite of this, however, he observed that there is broad consensus that AMISOM in its current form cannot bring about peace in Somalia. He argued that the mission's mandate does not provide for the protection of civilians; instead, it only seeks to protect the TFG and TFIs, and this has created the perception that it is neither neutral nor impartial. Coupled with a weak mandate and limited military capability, both in terms of size and equipment, AMISOM has thus become the target of the insurgency and has often been exposed to attacks.

AMISOM's task of combating groups engaged in conflict is further complicated by the complex nature of the situation in Somalia and the difficulty of combating a faceless and irregular group that employs guerrilla and asymmetrical tactics. This situation has placed AMISOM in danger of becoming a sitting duck, causing collateral casualties to the civilian population, and with no credible exit strategy. Dr Kisiangani also added that there is mistrust between TFG security forces and AMISOM. He

drew important lessons from the history of the conflict, especially the Ethiopian intervention, which showed that it is possible to win the military battle but get entangled in/bogged down by insurgency tactics and risk suffering casualties and a protracted guerilla war. He also expressed concern about the ability of AMISOM to bring about peace when neighbouring countries are fighting proxy wars and pursuing their own narrow interests in Somalia. In this regard, he was of the view that in order for AMISOM to have any chances of success, it needs to establish and work with reliable local partners and try and gain the support of the local civilian population. To him, the constantly changing nature of belligerent forces, the regionalisation and internationalisation of the conflict, and the involvement of competing external actors have compounded the peacemaking and peacekeeping problems in that country. He explained that the militarisation of society and the breakdown of the rule of law have also posed considerable challenges to peacebuilding and added that with more Somalis turning to weapons and correspondingly losing confidence in the ability of the rule of law to establish and maintain security, peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives should involve an array of awareness activities to help cultivate a culture of human rights and to build the confidence of Somalis in government institutions.

The challenge of making and keeping peace in Somalia, Dr Kisiangani observed, is also about how to strike the right balance between the need for achieving peace in the country and addressing external concerns, including those of Ethiopia (i.e. its fear of the establishment of an unfriendly government in Somalia), and also the power struggle between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The other external dimension that needs to be factored in is the question of the 'war against terror'. He argued that the

nature of the conflict in Somalia is such that peace processes that involve political settlements among factional leaders are highly inadequate. He said there is need for transformative approaches that include institutional building, control of the movement of arms, grass root reconciliation, and the deconstruction of divisive clan relations and discourses, as well as a reconfiguration of the war economy.

In his concluding remarks, Dr Kisiangani referred to the general perception and concern among some observers that Al Shabaab would introduce a Taliban-style government based on an archaic interpretation of the Qur'an. He argued that a major irony is that international efforts to prevent Al Shabaab from taking power have been used by the group to discredit the TFG and promote themselves as freedom fighters, thus making the TFG and AMISOM seem like foreign impositions. He cited

a US Council on Foreign Relations report that called on the West to reconsider its approach to dealing with the Somalia problem, given that previous policies have reinforced a mistrust of the West and unfortunately contributed to the prolongation of the conflict. He argued that Al Shabaab was responsible for gross human rights violations, but that, given the failure of previous attempts to establish a functioning government and the lessons from the experience of the ICU, it seems only logical that the international community should reach out to some of the leaders of Al Shabaab in the same way that it is doing in Afghanistan with the Taliban, with a view to stabilising the country and also dissuading the group from adopting extremist tendencies. In his view, the alternative scenario of continuing chaos would be far worse. He concluded by remarking that sometimes 'peace comes by dining with your enemy'.



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