HORN OF AFRICA BULLETIN
ANALYSES • CONTEXT • CONNECTIONS

Analyses

Somalia: From clan wars to religious conflicts

Starting in September 2011, for more than two years the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) and its local research partners in Somalia interviewed more than a hundred Somali politicians, leaders of an array of religio-political groups and movements, and grass-roots supporters and activists to document and examine the prevailing local conflict narratives about the war in Somalia. Based on this research, a report titled Alternatives to Conflict Transformation in Somalia was released in June 2014.

The following article summarises the report's key findings and argues that the conflict in Somalia is much more complex and complicated than suggested by the Terrorists-versus-Others assumption that underpins the international and regional community's response to Somalia question.

Over time the structure and nature of the conflict in Somalia have changed dramatically from what used to be an internecine clan-based intra-Somali civil war into a battlefront in the global war on terrorism. While clan feuds and alliances still determine much of local Somali politics, the political landscape in the country has been transformed by almost a quarter century of turmoil. An indicator of the complexity of Somalia's current situation is the sheer number of domestic, regional and international forces directly engaged in the conflict. This project undertaken by LPI and its local partners was an attempt to document the emerging political and conflict narratives in Somalia in order to develop a better understanding of the changing context and inform efforts to build peace in the country.

ACTS – an introduction

Several attempts have been made over the last two decades to end the conflict in Somalia and rebuild the state. None has yielded the desired results. Since the onset of the war on terrorism in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks against the United States, counterterrorism has been the primary driver of international actors' Somalia policy. The primacy of the counterterrorism narrative has overshadowed the diversity of Somali polity and given rise to a 'Terrorist-versus-Others' narrative that presents a simplistic picture of a multidimensional conflict.

The scope of LPI's research project-titled Alternatives to Conflict Transformation in Somalia (ACTS-was limited to identifying major Somali political entities,

documenting their ideological orientation and political objectives and strategies to achieve their goals. This report is by no means an exhaustive compendium of political actors in Somalia, or even in south-central Somalia.

The report does not claim to make a prognosis of the conflict. It does not purport to present an analysis of the conflict's root causes or history. What it does provide, is a snapshot of views, political positions and overall strategies of key Somali political actors during a particular period of six months since the election of the current federal government and adoption of the new provisional constitution in August and September 2012. The objective is to identify points of convergence and divergence among (and within) these factions to explore the possibility of finding nonviolent conflict transformation strategies.

Key findings and conclusions

Some of the notable observations and pieces of analysis from ACTS report can be summarised as follows:

Ascendency of religious movements: While none of the original Somali protagonists in the civil war had an ideological religious orientation, the political landscape in south-central Somalia is now dominated by faith-based organisations and movements. Generally known as 'political Islam', religious activism of various hues has occupied the centre-stage in the country's politics. Three of the seven political entities covered in this study - al-Shabab, Al-Islah and Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jam'a - are avowedly Islamists and make religion the main plank of their ideology and an Islamic state and society their ultimate goal.

The federal constitution also pledges to establish an Islamic state. The Jubaland administration, whose President Ahmed Mohamed Islam Madobe is the leader of Ras Kamboni Brigade, is also Islamist in its orientation and was part of the Islamic Courts Union which ruled south-central Somalia from June 2006 to December 2010.

Even the organisations not covered by this project-such as Hizbul Islam, Ala Sheikh and al-Ictisaam-are religious movements.

In fact, the Galmudug regional administration in south-central Somalia is the only major political actor in south-central Somalia that describes itself as 'secular'.

Diversity within 'political Islam': The above scenario challenges the notion of a monolithic Somali movement of 'political Islam'. Whilst this body of research clearly draws out a number of similarities between these movements in terms of organisational structure, modus operandi and strategies for socio-political transformation in Somalia, interviews with leaders and lay members of these movements also points to fault lines that divide these Somali Islamist groups to the extent of being a source of violent conflict. In addition to divergent religious orientation and sectarian differences, these groups also have different political agendas and sometimes rival foreign sponsors.

Unlike 2006 when 17 Islamist groups of all strands, including al-Shabab, had come together to form the Islamic Courts Union and ruled south-central Somalia for a rare six months of stability and peace, this research shows that the gaps and differences between them have widened to an extent that a reunion seems unlikely in the near future. While the international community and regional powers prop up so-called 'moderate Islamists', both at the centre in Mogadishu and in the regions such Jubaland, the extremist fringe has been further radicalised and broadened its recruitment base as well as sphere of activities. The hardening of the intra-Islamist divides is visible not only in the recent violent splits within al-Shabab. Other groups' attitude towards al-Shabab has also become less flexible due to a strong public sentiment throughout the region against the group.

Based on the responses received during this research project, Somali Islamists can be divided into three broad religious and political categories:

- *Traditionalists* (Sufi-oriented), such as ASWJ. They consider 'foreign' Islamist influences as anathema to traditional Somali Muslim culture and practices, and have taken up arms to counter them. For example, shrines and the Prophet's birthday celebrations are of great importance in the traditional Somali Muslim culture but Wahhabi movements like al-Shabab and most of the modernists see such practices as deviations from true Islamic tenets.

- *Modernists*, such as Al-Islah and the government of President Hassan Sheikh Mahamud, are the Somali equivalent of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and share the Brotherhood's ideology and methodology of Islamising modern education, engaging in social services and reforming the state and society along Islamic lines. They profess nonviolence.

- *Salafis* or *Wahabis*, such as al-Shabab, reject all modern education and 'western' influences, impose by force a strict interpretation of Sharia, consider every other Islamic movement and sect to be outside the pail of Islam and, most of them, have a global agenda of establishing a caliphate. Hence, al-Shabab's links to al-Qaida.

Regional and clan markers: Although the respondents were not asked to identify their clans, the genealogical dimension of political organisations and alliances is unmistakable in Somalia. Despite their ostensible approach to transcend clan and regional boundaries and promote an Islamist-Somali nationalism, political groups in Somalia tend to get associated with a specific regional span or dominated by a clan family. That is true of almost all the groups interviewed for this project except al-Shabab which retains a cross-clan-and even a non-Somali, international-base. All established and emerging regional administrations are associated with particular clans.

The dichotomy between these groups' nationalistic and, at times, universal outlook and, on the other hand, the imperative of clan dynamics emerges as one of the key features of Somalia's faith-based as well as secular political movements.

Need for a broad-based political settlement

The future of political movements, especially Islamic movements, in Somalia is very much tied to policies being pursued by the major powers internationally and in the region. Each of these Islamist organisations acts as a proxy of one or more regional or international powers. Unless there is a considered and deliberate policy by the international community of bringing all Somali factions in south-central Somalia to the negotiation table to hammer out a peace plan, the dominant Islamist groups will remain embroiled in Somalia's internal power struggle, more often than not through violent means.

The picture of Somalia that emerges from this study provides few signs of a broad-based political settlement of the multilayered conflict. While this research was initiated to explore alternatives for nonviolent conflict transformation, the findings show that there are also enormous challenges. A more comprehensive policy approach would require an analysis of not just the Somali political actors but also of the role of regional and international powers and the impact of their policies on the fragmented and broken country. What has become clear, though, is that the international community's focus on resolving the conflict militarily and through top-down state-building has been tried too often and too long in Somalia to succeed in the near future.

For more information contact LPI Resident Representative
jody.henderson@life-peace.org

The full report can be accessed at
http://www.life-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/The-ACTS-Report.pdf

IGAD and Somalia: Now and then

Somalia's former president Abdullahi Yusuf was right. About 10 years ago he asked the African Union (AU) to send a peacekeeping force of between 15,000 and 20,000 troops to Somalia to help stabilise the country that he had just been elected to lead[1]. His request was turned down.

Today, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is at 17,000-strong. The AU has got the authorisation of the United Nations Security Council to increase its force in Somalia to 22,000. This increase is believed to be necessary for AMISOM to be more effective in its work in Somalia[2].

When Yusuf made his request in October 2004, the security concerns in Somalia were different from today. There was no al-Shabab. Al-Qaeda operatives used Somalia as a hideout and nothing more. In Mogadishu, some clerics had formed Islamic courts. These courts had a mainly social welfare agenda and they worked independent of each other. They were still months away from becoming a cohesive group. The warlords who had divided up south and central Somalia amongst themselves were primarily interested in making money through extortion and the resources they controlled.

In retrospect, it is likely Somalia would have stabilised much faster then, if Yusuf's request had been accepted. But, back then, the assumption was that since Yusuf was elected with the backing of most warlords he had nothing to fear. The fact that some of those warlords held key cabinet positions strengthened those assumptions.

In fact, when Yusuf failed to relocate to Somalia from Nairobi months after his election to the presidency in October 2004, it was thought he was refusing to leave the comforts of Nairobi for the hard work of reconstructing Somalia. His security concerns were assumed to be a useful excuse to continue staying in Nairobi. So much so that in June 2005 the then Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki held a farewell tea at State House for Yusuf, members of the transitional federal government and parliament as a way of forcing them to go to Somalia[3]. The Kenyan government even stopped paying the hotel bills of the members of the transitional parliament to make its message clear.

Why peacekeepers were not sent in 2004

Kenya was not wrong in "nudging" the Somali leadership to go back home. But Kenya and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) that had steered the Somali peace process until that point did not do enough. IGAD did offer to deploy a protection force to secure the Somali leadership when it returned home. The force was to be modelled on the one South Africa deployed in Burundi around the same time, to protect Burundian rebel leaders who were returning from exile after a peace agreement had been reached. Its proposed size was modest compared to what Yusuf was asking the AU for. But then IGAD ran into the question of the arms embargo on Somalia. The UN Security Council did not consider it necessary at the time to amend the embargo to allow for such a protection force. It would be close to two years before the Security Council agreed to amend the arms embargo, allowing the AU to send its first batch of peacekeepers to Somalia in early 2007.

In retrospect, Kenya and IGAD should have lobbied more aggressively to persuade the Security Council. If that had been the case, it is likely that Kenya and IGAD would not be in the uncomfortable position they are in now. One of IGAD's key resolutions in 2004, when the idea of a protection force was mooted, was that no country neighbouring Somalia would contribute troops to that force.

This resolution was made in recognition of the fact that Somalia has a complex relationship with its neighbours, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. Djibouti is made up of Somalis and Ethiopia and Kenya have significant Somali populations. Somalia and Ethiopia fought a war in 1977. These countries sending in troops could be interpreted as them furthering the interests of their Somali populations. Then, there is the issue of a greater Somalia, the idea of uniting all Somali people in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya with those in Somalia.

Today, IGAD's aim of keeping relations between member states as simple and smooth as possible has been frustrated. Kenya has troops in AMISOM. So does Djibouti. Ethiopia, which has had troops in Somalia off and on since December 2006, has also become part of AMISOM.

Kenya is now in the unusual position of having a sometimes tense relationship with Mogadishu. The Somali government viewed the entry of Kenyan troops into Somalia in October 2011 with some suspicion and some officials made statements to that effect. The Kenyan troops were eventually re-hatted and became part of AMISOM. But Mogadishu has been hostile to Kenya's backing of the idea of an autonomous region in the Lower Jubba Valley area, which is now referred to as Jubbaland. Such a region has dubious constitutional legitimacy and Kenya's involvement in that region and backing of its leader, Sheikh Madobe, is the source of the hostility.

This issue, however, has not affected the long-term relationship between Kenya and Somalia. Most international organisations and embassies that have programmes and projects in Somalia are based in Nairobi. Kenya hosts hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees, many of whom have been in the country for 23 years.

Impact on Kenyan economy

The Somali issue that has had the biggest impact on Kenya is al-Shabab. There is the immediate terror and trauma of attacks such as the one on the Westgate Shopping Mall in September last year, or more recently in Lamu County. Scores of lives have been lost. And now the impact of the attacks is being reflected in the balance sheets of Kenya's major corporations.

Kenya's third largest supermarket chain, Uchumi, noted in its latest half year report that they have recorded reduced numbers of people going to shopping malls following the Westgate Shopping Mall attack. Uchumi said this is one of the reasons they have recorded a decline in their business[4]. The tourism industry has recorded a sharp decline in business this year and one of the obvious reasons for this is the travel advisories issued by Britain, the United States and other countries. These travel advisories warn of possible terrorist attacks, especially along Kenya's coast, a popular destination for tourists.

Kenya and Tanzania were the first countries where al-Qaeda carried out successful attacks. This was the simultaneous bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in August 1998. It was only in 2003, however, that Kenya formed its first police unit dedicated to counterterrorism. The government funds the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit's operations budget but much of the equipment the unit uses has been provided by Britain and the United States. And in what now seems to be the trend, after a major attack the intelligence service is reported to have provided the police intelligence of an attack days before it occurred. Kenya's challenge now is to come up with an effective counterterrorism strategy, which would help ease nerves and rebuild confidence that though terror attacks may occur, the government is doing all it can to prevent them. This is a huge challenge.

It is likely that Kenya would only be worrying about al-Qaeda attacks if only Kenya and IGAD had listened to Abdullahi Yusuf and pushed hard for the troops he was arguing for in 2004.

Tom Maliti covered the final stage of the Somali peace talks in 2004 for The Associated Press and continued to follow and report on developments in Somalia until he left the agency in 2011. Currently, he is a trial monitor for International Justice Monitor, a website that reports on the Kenya cases at the International Criminal Court.
He can reached at tom.maliti@gmail.com

---

1   Source: http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/reportsomalia-22nd.pdf

2   See http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-rpt-399-amisom-09-10-2013.pdf

3   See http://www.apnewsarchive.com/2005/Somali-Prime-Minister-Leaves-Kenya/id-d493ac4911b47dea3880f7c2e6f16b74

4   Source: http://www.theafricareport.com/Reuters-Feed/Kenya-s-Uchumi-posts-H1-profit-fall-as-insecurity-hits-retail.html

How to end holy wars

Ending Holy Wars: religion and conflict resolution in civil wars,
by Isak Svensson, University of Queensland Press, 2012

Some of the most intractable and protracted wars of our times are couched in religious terms and jargon. Be it the war in Somalia or killings in Nigeria, Israel-Palestine conflict or Ireland's Troubles, the decades of warfare in Afghanistan or the militancy in Mali, there is a dash of religion in every violent brew. Holy wars are all round.

In this thoroughly researched, well-argued and highly relevant book, Isak Svensson of the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden, sets out to explore the various dimensions of armed conflicts with a focus on the role of religion as a hurdle in conflict termination. For this examination of the role of religion in conflicts, Svensson places himself "somewhere between an instrumentalist and a constructivist approach to the study of religion and violence" (the author identifies ´instrumentalism' as religious identities, traditions and aspirations "as created by elites in order to advance their goals" and `constructivism' as the approach that sees them as social constructs.) While his central arguments are built on the "assumption that religious conflicts are...created socially; they are elite-driven processes", the author's main concern is not how those conflicts are constructed but "how they are deconstructed."

The scope of the book is, thus, well defined and limited. Svensson covers occurrences of organised interreligious and intra-religious civil wars over a 35-year period (1975 to 2010) which lends his work a contemporary relevance. The extensive literature review done by the author leads him to conclude that "research on religion and conflicts can be organised along two dichotomous" categories: religion as a problem and religion as a solution. Along each of these two axes emerge two research areas: work dealing with "conflict onset" and "conflict termination". This book is largely limited to the latter category of religion's problematic role in achieving conflict resolution.

Making full use of the quantitative information generated by the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, Svensson's research draws on examples from round the world—from the Balkans to Syria, from Sri Lanka to the Philippines—and maps the religious dimension in almost all contemporary armed conflicts. Divided into six chapters, Ending Holy Wars opens with an introduction where the author gives a synopsis of his work and runs through a process of conceptualisation. Although his research is qualified by pertinent examples and significant data from a wide range of violent conflicts, it is the theoretical framework of the book that this reviewer finds more engaging and educational than actual incidences of successful or failed bids to resolve those conflicts.

The numerous conceptual distinctions the author has made (for example, the three ways in which religion manifests itself in conflicts: identities, incompatibilities and centrality) reflects not only the extent of his research and review of secondary sources. It also underscores the restraint and care he observes in separating and examining different approaches to studying religion and conflict.

The main thrust of Svensson's argument here is that taking the religious element out of conflicts – or desacralisation – enhances the probability of reaching a negotiated settlement.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the link between a conflict's religious dimensions and the likelihood of negotiated settlements, with case studies of various forms of formal processes of resolution, while Chapter 4 studies other "forms of unilateral attempts to desacralise religious conflicts". After going through this exhaustive exercise, in Chapter 5 the author draws empirical insights as he attempts to theorise the "process through which religious issues become less important" so that the likelihood of reaching peace agreements may increase.

The last chapter summarises the implications of this work on conflict theory and policy design. Three main concerns of the author in the realm of policy are "gender implications" (desacralisation may have negative effects on the right of wome), "the

design of peace processes" (at what stage desacralisation comes into a ppeace process?) and "religious peacemaking" (which, ironically, seems to be more effective in conflicts where religion does not play a central role).

The book is peppered with pithy observations and catchy yet instructive statistics. When does fighting between different groups qualifies as an armed conflict (when "a contested incompatibility ... between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths" per year)? What percentage of conflicts since 1975 has had parties from the same religious traditions and how many have crossed religious identities (70% and 30%, respectively)? What are the trends in terms of intensity and frequency of these conflicts during the period under scrutiny? The book is also well illustrated with graphs and tables to capture these statistics and back up the assertions the author makes.

The reviewer is Najum Mushtaq, LPI's regional policy coordinator. He can be reached at najum.mushtaq@life-peace.org

Resources

Oil in Somalia

Dominik Balthasar, "Oil in Somalia: Adding fuel to the fire?" Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, Mogadishu, Somalia, June 2014

The promise of oil finds in Somalia make the war-torn country the latest 'frontier region' of hydrocarbon exploration and production in East Africa. Given its history of conflict, though, it may also be the most challenging country for exploiting these natural resources. Dr Dominik Balthasar, a development policy fellow at Mogadishu's Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, examines the potential of Somalia as an oil exporting country while being a fragile, if not broken, state. The report analyses the phenomenon of 'resource curse' from Somalia's perspective and suggests possible solutions to the problem. The main question that the report addresses is that of whether Somalia is ready for oil.

The report can accessed at http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/ uploads/2014/06/HIPS-Oil_in_Somalia-ENGLISH.pdf

Merging with the enemy

Roy Licklider (Eds.), New Armies from Old: Merging Competing Military Forces after Civil Wars, Georgetown University Press, April 2014

Post-conflict reconciliation remains a problematic theme in peacebuilding literature. Settlements after civil wars invariably involve power sharing among the former opponents to attempt to fuse a new representative society. "International mediators often recommend that these agreements also merge the competing armed groups into a single national army. The presumed merits of this strategy have become common wisdom among conflict-resolution practitioners, but little systematic research has been conducted to test whether or not this works," says this book and asks: Can people who recently have been killing one another be effectively merged into a single military force? Under what conditions is military integration more or less likely to succeed? Is military integration a good idea in all cases?

This volume includes eleven case studies from Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Lebanon, Philippines, and Bosnia-Herzegovina and uses a comparative case-study approach. This research fills a gap in our understanding of problems in post-civil war societies, their possible resolution, and how to promote lasting peace.

See a summary of this publication at http://press.georgetown.edu/book/georgetown/new-armies-old

Environment, livelihoods and peacebuilding in Sudan

Relationships and Resources: Environmental governance for peacebuilding and resilient livelihoods in Sudan, United Nations Environment Programme, June 2014

This is the third UNEP report focusing on environmental governance and its linkages with building resilient communities particularly in Darfur and more broadly in the Sudan. The focus of this report is on the process by which governance and peacebuilding may be promoted in Darfur using natural resources as a means of building trust and relationships between communities. The report urges that environmental governance must be included in long-term peacebuilding in conflict where competition over natural resources causes violence. The report also advocates for a relationships-based approach to addressing such conflicts.

See the full report at http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/UNEP_Sudan_RnR.pdf

Building a new nation

Justine Fleischner and Akshaya Kumar, A Path to Peace for South Sudan: An Overview, Enough Project, June 2014

South Sudan had gained independence amid much euphoria and optimism. The country's descent into civil war in December 2013 has raised questions about the viability of the new state. In this policy overview, Justine Fleischner and Akshaya Kumar of the Enough Project analyses the current situation since the signing of a peace deal between the rival groups earlier this year and proposes measures to restart the process of nation building. This process, say the authors, "involves strengthening state institutions to conduct a national census, constitutional review process, and national elections as the basis for political inclusion."

Access to economic livelihoods and the transformation of the security forces to protect the rights of citizens are also critical components of the nation-building process that cannot be accomplished without sustained high-level diplomatic engagement and long-term commitments from the international community, concludes the report.

See the report at

http://www.enoughproject.org/reports/whitepaper-south-sudan-201406