

Somalia

The Endless Search for Peace

Katabaro Miti

Somalia, and Mogadishu in particular, has been aptly described as “the Hell on Earth.” This description is based on the level of destruction and human suffering that has been going on since 1991. There is no respite in sight despite the endless negotiations between the various factions, warlords and clans. In fact, the situation is getting worse by the day. All indications are that not everybody wants peace in Somalia. Those who are benefiting from the war economy and the aid economy, the warlords and sea pirates who are cashing in millions of dollars from hijacked ships and illegal trade, do not want peace. These are often referred to as spoilers. Besides, the clan politics, on which most of the peace negotiations are based, act as an impediment to peace in that they are based on future gains stemming from the control of the central government, hence the zero sum calculations of clans and sub clans. Equally, not all external actors in the Somali conflict are searching for peace. Most of these are just promoting their particular interests. This is more so for both Ethiopia and the USA, the principle external actors. The constant questions being asked are whether there is a way out of the current impasse in Somalia?; and in whose interest will it be? One can only hazard an answer to these questions after outlining the basic current realities of Somalia.

Basic realities of the current Somalia

By Somalia here we mean Southern Somalia, since the former British Somaliland declared its independence in 1991 immediately after the fall of Siad Barre. It had joined Southern Somalia in 1960. Unfortunately, however, nobody wants to

accept and acknowledge this *fait accompli* and recognise Somaliland in the vain hope that once peace returns to Southern Somalia the two will unite again. Puntland, which created its own autonomous administration in 1998 despite its leaders participating in both the Transitional National Government (TNG) and the Transitional

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Federal Government (TFG), is also excluded from the discussions.

One basic element of the current Somalia is its complete fragmentation. Over the years, one has witnessed the rise and fall of quasi-city states and local administrations of various forms under the control of warlords or alliances of warlords of various descriptions, including the partition of Mogadishu into sub districts. The irony of the matter is that it was only the emergence of Islamic courts in late 2006 that brought a semblance of a unified administration over Mogadishu and most of Southern Somalia.

However, this was against the interests of the USA and Ethiopia, resulting in Ethiopia's invasion and the capture of Mogadishu. This caused further fragmentation of Southern Somalia, with factions fighting for control of various areas.

Fragmentation has been accompanied by the creation of all sorts of militias (armed groups). These have included clan militias, warlords or faction militias, business militias and Islamic court militias. Of importance to note is the manipulation of these militias by external forces that has resulted in intense clashes between the various militias. The biggest clash was between the Islamic Court Union (ICU) militias and the US backed Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism (ARPTC – generally referred to as ATA – Anti Terrorist Alliance) that resulted not only in massive destruction in Mogadishu and the complete defeat of the alliance in June 2006, but which was followed by the defeat of the ICU in December 2006 by the Ethiopian troops, which opened the way back to warlords militias.

Tied to the warlords and militias has been the dramatic rise of sea piracy that has resulted in over 90 ships being hijacked in 2008. Piracy and the enormous ransoms being extorted has highlighted the dangers of a stateless Somalia and has drawn in various western navies in an attempt to secure the sea lanes through the Gulf of Eden, through which over 2000 ships pass every year. The UN Security Council has called upon states to implement the 1988 Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation ("SUA Convention"). This, however, has not resulted in any improvement in the piracy situation off the coast of Somalia (UNSC Resolution 1814, 1816, 1836 and 1846 of 2008).

The third element that needs noting is the intense clan rivalry and clan politics that have been at the centre of Somali life since independence. At one extreme has been the continuous entertainment of a greater Somalia that would incorporate all areas where the Somalis are dominant. This has

been based on the false notion of the oneness or homogeneity of Somalis on the basis of language and culture. This resulted in constant conflicts between Somalia and its neighbours, in particular Ethiopia, over the Ogaden, resulting in three bloody wars between the two countries during the period of 1960 and 1978. This has entrenched Ethiopian presence and permanent interest in Somali politics. It was the ICU's call for the creation of a greater Somalia that prompted the current Ethiopian invasion. Kenya also has a sizeable population of Somalis in the Northern Districts. This has prompted skirmishes between Kenya and the Mogadishu regimes. Kenya, like Ethiopia, has a permanent interest on who takes over power in Somalia. Djibouti's population is basically Somali and a greater Somalia would, therefore, lay claims on Djibouti. Thus, Somalia's irredentism has caused constant hostility and suspicion from all its neighbors. This has complicated the search for peace through the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) because most of the members of this authority are interested parties in Somali politics.

At the other extreme is the constant clan and sub clan rivalry and wars for the control of the state. This has been a constant source of instability in Somalia long before the fall of Siad Barre. The fall of Siad Barre saw the intensification of clan and sub clan conflicts. For example, the major conflict that drew the United States and the United Nations into Somalia in 1993 was centered on the Hawiye sub clan rivalry between Mohamed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi for the control of Mogadishu. By taking sides against Farah Aideed, the USA made the situation worse. Clan and sub clan rivalry has resulted in the constant formation of opportunistic alliances that keep on changing. This was clearly manifested in the TNG and the TFG that failed to operate because of the shifting alliances. But, despite the understanding of this reality, all negotiations have been based on some form of clan balancing.

The 4.5 formula was first adopted by the TNG in 2000. The formula allocates an equal number of seats in parliament to each of the four major clan families – the Darood, Hawiye, Dir and Dingle Mirifle, and half that number to remaining minority groups. This has often resulted in large parliaments (245 under the TFG and the recent proposal is to increase the number to 500) and huge cabinets (over 80 under the TFG). This has largely proved to be unworkable and unmanageable. Clan horse trading has often resulted in the creation of alternative leadership and opposition factions making the establishment of a stable

government impossible. The outcome has been clan based violence, as clans and sub clans have armed themselves to protect their interests. This has resulted in the parceling of the country, including the capital Mogadishu, into clan and sub clan areas that makes a unified administration almost impossible. As the ICG (2007) notes, the country has dissolved into a patchwork of regional administrations, city states and clan fiefdoms. In turn, this has created permanent grievances for those who have lost both land and property to other clans and sub clans. Thus, for De Waal (2007), the property issue in terms of real estate in Mogadishu and farmland in Southern Somalia will have to be resolved before any political settlement is agreed upon.

The fourth critical element in the current Somalia is Islam. Somalia's Islamic roots date back to the 13th century. It has one basic advantage of crossing clan lines and being readily understood and widely utilised in the Arab World. Islam has linked Somalia to the Arab states and the Islamic world. This has had both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, it has facilitated trade and the movement of people between Somalia and the Arab world that accounts for the current survival of the Somali population in two important ways. One is the availability of Islamist financial resources that are dispersed through private philanthropic channels. These resources have helped to meet part of the basic needs of the population, in particular, health and education. Two has been the creation of a remittance system, that is, the transfer of money from Somalis living in the diaspora, mostly in the Arab states, back to Somalia. This money has been used to establish thriving urban enclave economies and has helped through its sustaining of various financial services to support a range of social services.

Islam has also had negative consequences, the main one being the identification of Somali Islamic elements with Islamic fundamentalism, and since 11 September 2001, with Islamic terrorism against the west under the *al Qaeda* umbrella. This has drawn the USA once more into the Somali conflict and complicated the peace process. First was the refusal to recognise the TNG, labeling it as a platform for Islamic groups and thus making it impossible to function and take root. Secondly was the hasty decision by the USA to freeze the operations of the largest financial house, *Al Barakaat*, on unproven accusations of being a conduit of *al Qaeda* funds, and the listing of various individuals and groups, including Islamic charity organisations, as terrorists. This only heightened Somali hatred

for America. Third was the payment by the USA of several militia and business leaders to monitor suspected terrorists in Somalia. This not only strengthened the warlords and finally led to an open confrontation between the warlords – now organised under the Alliance for the ARPTC – and the emerging ICU, in Mogadishu in early 2006.

The defeat of the American backed Warlords' alliance by the ICU in June 2006 brought Mogadishu and Southern Somalia a modicum of peace for the first time in years. This made the Islamist the most powerful military and political group that could not be ignored. But, instead of working for a compromise between the *Sharia* courts, that is, the ICU and the TFG, the USA opted for an armed overthrow of the *Sharia* Courts Administration. It did this by supporting the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia at the so-called request of the TFG. The defeat of the *Sharia* courts did not bring about peace. Instead, the warlords have re-emerged and faction fighting re-ignited. In fact, the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006 resulted in the worst fighting since the civil war of the early '90s and, equally, to the worst humanitarian crisis (Guaranto (2008). Is the election and swearing in of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the leader of the ICU, and his Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) as the new President of Somalia, going to bring stability and durable peace in the war torn country? President Ahmed was sworn in on 01 February 2009 in Djibouti.

The last element that needs stressing is the ever-growing humanitarian crisis. The situation in Somalia is much worse than in Darfur, where most attention is currently focused. In 1993, the USA and the UN had intervened in Somalia on humanitarian grounds. By the time they left in 1995 the situation was much worse, and has never improved since. However, the confrontation between the warlords and the Islamic courts made the situation desperate. The respite offered by the Islamic court administration was short-lived. The heavy fighting that followed the Ethiopian invasion made most people in Somalia refugees and destitute, and there appears to be no relief in sight. But can the current obstacles to peace be removed with the withdrawal of the Ethiopian troops?

Removing Obstacles to Peace in Somalia

There are two types of obstacles in the search for peace in Somalia, namely external and internal obstacles. The two main external obstacles are the United States and Ethiopia.

The United States and the Somalia Conflict

America's war on terror has included Somalia as one of the countries under the influence of *al Qaeda* and the *Jihadists*. This has resulted in: (a) American mobilisation of Somali neighbours into the war against terror that was understood as the containment and elimination of terrorist elements in the lawless Somalia. We have already noted how individuals and groups in Somalia were included on the terrorist list but, in 2002, the USA created a Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), based in Djibouti. In 2003, it launched the US\$100million East Africa Counter Terrorism Initiative (EACTI) that included Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda; (b) the authorisation of military operations to monitor and assess the situation in Somalia that included over-flights with P3 aircrafts, the patrolling of the Somalia coastline by US ships and submarines, and the infiltration of special forces into Somalia; and (c), the payment of Somali warlords to hunt for suspected terrorists inside Somalia, and to challenge the ICU.

A number of things need to be noted about this USA involvement in Somalia. First is the American paranoia with Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic activism. This has led to the fear of anything Islam by the USA Administration. This has, in turn, led to a belief among Somalis and Muslims elsewhere that the US war on terror is, in fact, a war on Islam. It is this paranoia and fear that led to the USA's opportunistic partnership with the Somali warlords that had kept the country at ransom for years against the ICU, that had begun to establish order in Mogadishu. Second is the USA's complete disregard of innocent civilians in its pursuit of terrorists and its global interests. Three suspected terrorists hiding in Somalia, Fazul Abdullah Muhamed, Abu Taha al Sudan and Ali Saleh Nabhan, were enough justification for the killing of hundreds of civilians and creating a huge refugee problem and misery for thousands of Somalis. These casualties, in American parlance, are referred to as *collateral damage*, that is, damages of war that could not be avoided. This has also been the US attitude in Afghanistan and Iraq. For the USA, everything is permissible in the pursuit of its own interests. This attitude has, however, created more enemies and increased the recruiting ground for terrorists.

Unless the USA stops seeing the Somalia conflict from the terrorist and Islamic fundamentalist lens, no peace can be achieved in Somalia. After all, the Somalia conflict pre dates the 9/11 bombing in the USA. As Moller (2007) notes,

the steps taken to curtail a nonexistent terrorist threat in Somalia might end up creating one. Its support of the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia has only helped to complicate the situation and increased the violence and instability in Somalia. The creation of anti-terrorist bases in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya has only helped to polarise the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and make it partisan and hence ineffective in resolving the Somalia conflict. It has furthermore made it difficult for other western countries to engage forcibly in Somalia for fear of being accused by the USA of supporting terrorist activities. It is this that accounts for the limited interest in Somalia. International interest has been limited to the provision of humanitarian aid.

Ethiopia and the Somalia Conflict

Between 1960 and 1978, Ethiopia and Somalia fought three wars over the disputed Ogaden region that is inhabited by Somalis but under Ethiopian control. This has resulted over time in each country supporting armed groups against each other. It was, in fact, Ethiopian support for the Somali National Movement (SNM) and the United Somali Congress (USC) that led to the 1988-1992 civil war that saw the ousting of Siad Barre and created the situation to date. Since then, Ethiopia has remained the most important player in the Somalia conflict in the Horn of Africa. This has led many observers to accuse Ethiopia of deliberately wanting to maintain a weak and divided Somalia (Quaranta 2008; Afyare and Barise 2006; Sadiki 2007). Ethiopia has been accused of blocking the Cairo Accord in 1997 that had been signed by 28 Somali warlords and factions. It exerted pressure on the Somali Salvation Alliance (SSA, the Sodere Group of 15 factions) and forced it to opt out of the accord it had signed with the Somali National Alliance (SNA, which included the other 13 factions).

Ethiopia was further responsible for undermining the TNG that emerged out of the Arta Conference in Djibouti in 2000. It accused the TNG of being an Islamic front, which led to it being denied recognition by the USA. This rendered it inoperative and was toppled in October 2001. To replace the TNG, Ethiopia, with other IGAD members, started the Eldoret (Kenya) process in October 2002. This resulted two years later in the establishment of the TFG on the basis of clan quotas. Partly because of the manner in which it was formed, the TFG had to stay in Kenya until 2006, when it finally moved to Baidoa and not Mogadishu, which had by then fallen under the

control of ICU. To resolve the impasse between the TFG and the ICU, Ethiopia invaded Somali and installed its protégé in Mogadishu in December 2006. This completely immersed Ethiopia deep into the Somalia conflict. Its protégé, however, was merely in residence in Mogadishu but not in power, a situation that forced Ethiopian troops to remain in Mogadishu. However, with no end of conflict in sight, Ethiopia withdrew its troops from Somalia on January 2009.

Both the invasion and ensuing occupation by Ethiopia of Somalia sparked national sentiments, and led to the taking up of arms against Ethiopian troops in Mogadishu. This resulted in endless clashes and violence in the capital, and led to the formation of the ARS. The violence that peaked in April 2007 resulted in an exodus from Mogadishu and the swelling of refugee camps.

Given the level of hostility against Ethiopian troops, it was clear that they had to withdraw from Somalia. Only Uganda and Rwanda have so far contributed troops to the African force. This small force, however, has so far remained encamped at the airport, not daring to enter the hot areas of Mogadishu. Unfortunately, Ethiopian involvement in Somalia drew its arch enemy Eritrea into the fray, turning the conflict into a proxy war between the two countries.

The Other External Actors in Somalia

There are other external actors in Somalia, many of which are multilateral organisations that have attempted to broker peace in Somalia. They have had very little success, however. At the top of these organisations is IGAD, constituted mainly of the Somali's neighbours. But because of the direct involvement of some IGAD members in Somalia (notably Ethiopia) and the support of competing Somali factions, the organisation is unable to resolve the Somali conflict. In fact, bigger members like Ethiopia have transformed the mediation process to their own advantage. The second organisation is the African Union (AU). But because the AU lacks its own armed forces and other resources, it has a tendency to delegate the mediation process to the regional bodies, in this case IGAD, and to rely on external funding. The AU has become completely ineffective in the case of Somalia. The third organisation engaged in Somalia is the United Nations (UN), but since the debacle of its humanitarian intervention in 1995, it has shied away from Somalia. It has just been endorsing IGAD and AU initiatives, with little debate. The USA position on Somalia has also hindered close scrutiny by the

UN Security Council (UNSC). The fourth organisation is the Arab League. The League, however, has remained a minor player in Somalia, and its basic role has been the provision of funding for the negotiation process. The last external organisation that is involved in Somalia is the International Contact Group for Somalia, that includes the EU, Italy, Kenya, Norway, Sweden, Tanzania, UK, US, AU, IGAD, the Arab League and the UN. This group is too diverse to have any meaningful impact on the Somalia conflict. It is time, therefore, for the UN to take full responsibility of the peace process in Somalia.

Dealing with the Endemic Internal Stalemate

At the heart of the current impasse in Somalia is the existence of millions of militias under the control of opposing groups. Unless the powers of these militias and warlords are curtailed there will be no solution for Somalia. Indeed, it was the armed ministers of the TFG that sabotaged the TFG. There is, therefore, something to learn from the ICU (Sharia) courts that brought some order to Mogadishu during their short reign in 2006. Their success was based on the creation of a strong and unified militia under the joint courts' administration. The basic element of this administration was the militia to which each local court contributed 80 militia members and three to five technical battle wagons. This combined militia was stronger than the individual local court militias and could, therefore, intervene in disputes that involved members' militias. It could also call upon the members' militias for assistance. It was through this combined strength that they were able to remove roadblocks and defeat the reluctant warlords. This is something that needs to be emulated by any administration in Mogadishu and southern Somalia. The only problem is that it demands a certain level of trust among those that are pooling their militias together. Islam appears to have provided this level of trust in that it transcended the clan system without replacing it. However, one should not forget that there was direct local participation in the ICU. At the top of the courts was the *Shura* (council) that included political, traditional, business and religious leaders from the clans. This *Shura* appointed a chairman and a militia commander.

What this points to is that the administration of Sheikh Ahmed will have to consider starting from the bottom up to create a national government. He will have to deal with the existing small

administrative units of whatever nature, and link them to each other into regional units, and finally into a national government. The process so far has been different. Agreement was sought between the warlords (the Cairo Agreement), and when this did not work, an attempt was made to broker an agreement between clan leaders and armed factions. This is how both the TNG and TFG were created. These have proved to be ineffective and have lacked any legitimacy. The ICU took an opposite route and succeeded where others had failed. This is the lesson that needs to be learned in the current search for peace in Somalia. It is the best way to eliminate spoilers to the peace process.

Conclusion

The main sufferers in Somalia have been the innocent citizens who have had to endure all types of deprivation and to dodge death on a daily basis. Human life has lost any meaning as warlords and clan leaders have fought for power and control of resources. It is time that the millions of Somali refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and starving individuals and families are brought into the picture. Peace in Somalia is possible but for this to happen the following must take place:

- The UN should once more take centre stage in the resolution of the Somalia Conflict. IGAD and the AU have proved incapable of the task.
- The USA must cease to take Somalia as a terrorist haven or training ground, and be prepared to accept Islam as part of the Somalia realities.
- Accept and implement a bottom up approach to the reconstruction of the Somali State.

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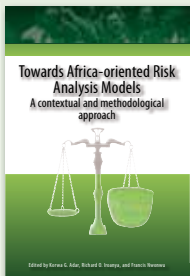
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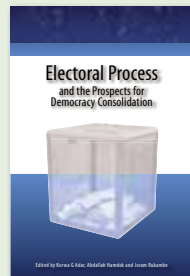
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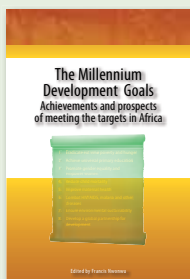
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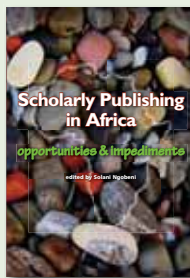
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