



DIIS REPORT

THE SOMALI CONFLICT
THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS

Bjørn Møller

DIIS REPORT 2009:03

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Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS

Strandgade 56, DK-1401 Copenhagen, Denmark

Ph: +45 32 69 87 87

Fax: +45 32 69 87 00

E-mail: diis@diis.dk

Web: www.diis.dk

Cover Design: Carsten Schiøler

Layout: Allan Lind Jørgensen

Cover Photo: AP/Farah Abdi Warsameh

Printed in Denmark by Vesterkopi AS

ISBN 978-87-7605-305-5

Price: DKK 50.00 (VAT included)

DIIS publications can be downloaded

free of charge from www.diis.dk

Hardcopies can be ordered at www.diis.dk

This publication is part of DIIS's Defence and Security Studies project which is funded by a grant from the Danish Ministry of Defence.

Bjørn Møller, Senior Researcher, DIIS.

The author holds an MA in History and a PhD in International Relations, both from the University of Copenhagen. Since 1985, he has been (senior) researcher at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI), which in 2003 became part of the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), where he is attached to the Defence and Security research unit. He served as Secretary General of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA) from 1997 to 2000, and has been external lecturer at the University of Copenhagen, both at the Institute of Political Studies since 1994 and at the Centre of African Studies since 2002. In addition to being the author of numerous articles and editor of seven anthologies, he is the author of three books.

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Abstract

Somalia has been without a functioning state ever since 1991, when the former dictator, Siyad Barre, was overthrown. None of the competing factions were strong enough to take his place as ruler of the country, producing first chaos, but gradually a form of stateless order. The international interventions have ever since the failed, and counter-productive intervention by the United Nations and the United States in the early 1990 exacerbated rather than mitigated the problems, let alone solved them. This was especially the case for the Ethiopian invasion (December 2006-January 2009), which produced utter chaos and a severe humanitarian crisis. Since the withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces, Islamist extremist militias have been establishing control of Somalia, and they may or may not be able to maintain this control. If they pursue their radical programme of Islamisation, their reign is likely to be short, but if they moderate themselves they may retain control.

Preface

In 2008 Somalia again attracted considerable international attention, as it had done during the civil war in the early 1990s. The reason was not so much the million or so refugees and internally displaced persons, the severe malnutrition among the Somali population or other aspects of the extremely complex humanitarian emergency ravaging this country, but rather the new dangers to the international shipping industry posed by the surge of piracy off the Somali coast.

In retrospect, the almost total international neglect of Somalia between 1995 and around 2005 may have been a blessing in disguise, as there seems to be an eerie correlation between interference by the so-called ‘international community’ in Somali affairs and deteriorating conditions for the local population. This correlation does, of course, lend itself to the ‘innocent’ explanation that the international community has rushed to the assistance of the Somalis whenever the need was most pressing, i.e. that the ‘causal arrow’ has pointed from need to intervention. However, there is considerable evidence that the causal arrow actually points in the opposite direction, i.e. that the situation has deteriorated because of, rather than in spite of, international intervention. If this is indeed the case, the most obvious lesson to be learned is to leave the country alone, but this may be too simplistic, as there may well be significant differences between the various external actors becoming involved, as well as between different kinds of involvement, some of which may indeed be beneficial, even though the aggregate effects of all external involvement is negative.

In an attempt to solve this puzzle, the present report commences with a ‘thick’ analytical narrative of recent Somali history with a special focus on the various crises and the roles played by international actors. This is followed by an analysis of the various actors, ranging from next-door neighbours in the Horn of Africa, through regional and global international organisations and extra-regional great powers, to various categories of non-state actors.

A longer and fully documented version of the present report is available online <www.diis.dk/graphics/Staff/bmo/Pdf/Somalia.pdf> to which the readers are referred for further details and references. For an analysis of the piracy issue in relation to Somalia, readers are referred to a forthcoming *DIIS Brief* by the present author.

Copenhagen, February 2009

List of Abbreviations

AIAI	<i>Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya</i>
AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
AQ	<i>Al Qaeda</i>
ARPCT	Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism
ARS	Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia
AU	African Union (AU)
CJTTF-HOA	Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa
EACTI	East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative
EJI	Eritrean Islamic Jihad
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MOD	<i>Marrehaan, Ogaadeen, Dulbahante</i>
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OEF-HOA	Operation Enduring Freedom-Horn of Africa
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogadeen National Liberation Front
REC	Regional Economic Community
SNM	Somali National Movement
SRSR	Special Representative of the Secretary General
SSDF	Somali Salvation Democratic Front
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
TFI	Transitional Federal Institutions
TFP	Transitional Federal Parliament
TNG	Transitional National Government
TPLF	Tigrayan People's Liberation Front
UIC	Union of Islamic Courts
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNITAF	United Task Force Somalia
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
UNPOS	United Nations Political Office for Somalia
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
UWSLF	United Western Somali Liberation Front
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front

I. The Somali Conflict: Narrative

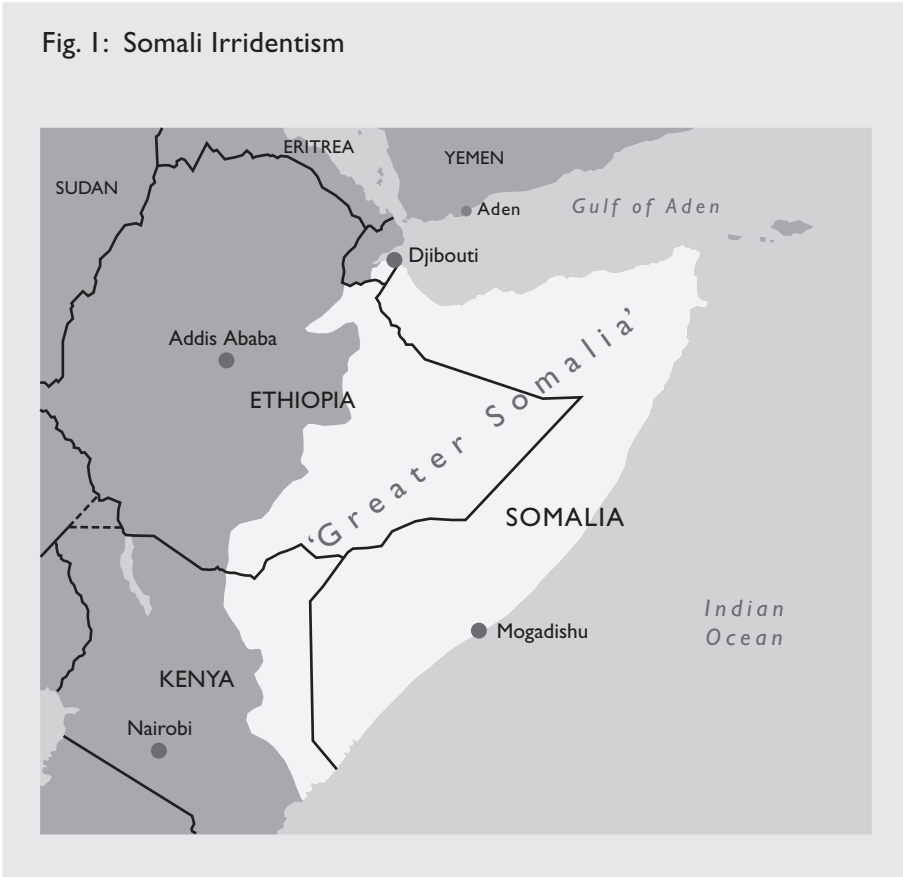
Even though the actual origins of the Somali people are obscure, an important mythology of origin has nevertheless been built around them, according to which the Somali stem from the Arabian Peninsula, perhaps even from a handful of Islamic missionaries who were dispatched from Arabia by the Prophet himself around AD 615. Even though the veracity of this is very questionable, there is no doubt that relations with the Arabian Peninsula have been quite extensive for many centuries, involving trade, migration and missionary activities. As far as the latter were concerned, the Somali people did indeed embrace Islam, though not the puritan and fundamentalist *Wahhabi* version of it, which has been predominant on the Arabian Peninsula since the beginning of the twentieth century. Rather, the Somali stuck to their own Sufist version of Islam, mainly represented by the *Qadiriya*, *Salibiya* and *Ahmadiya* brotherhoods.

Never having had anything resembling a common state, during the infamous ‘scramble for Africa’ in the late nineteenth century, the Somali nation was divided up among several colonial powers, each of which built up state-like administrative institutions. Britain took control of the northern part, i.e. present-day Somaliland, as well as all of present-day Kenya, including those parts in the north which were almost exclusively populated by ethnic Somalis. France established a colony in what is now Djibouti, while Italy took control of various territories along the eastern coast which in 1905 became a colony comprising most of present-day Somalia minus Somaliland. Besides these European colonialists, however, Abyssinia (no Ethiopia) also expanded into territories with a Somali majority, mainly the present-day Somali Region of Ethiopia, formerly known as the Ogadeen Province.

In view of this imposed partition, it was hardly surprising that the Somali state was born to be irridendist, i.e. with the ambition of unifying all the Somali nation into one nation state; indeed, this nationalist project was symbolically represented in the new flag, which featured a five-pointed star. The five points represented former British Somaliland and Italian Somalia—which were united within a week of independence—plus Djibouti, the Ogadeen province of Ethiopia and the north-eastern part of Kenya (see map of ‘Greater Somalia’ in Fig. 1).¹ Understandable though this

¹ From www.africanpath.com/p_blogEntry.cfm?blogEntryID=2288.

Fig. 1: Somali Irridentism



irridentism may have been, it launched the new state on a collision path with its neighbours, and relations with both Kenya and Ethiopia have been severely strained. First came the low-key 'Shifita war' with Kenya (1963-1968), in which the Somali government supported the Northern Frontier Districts Liberation Army in its struggle for autonomy.

Then came the much more serious 'Ogaden War' with Ethiopia (1977-78), which likewise began with Somali support for indigenous, secessionist rebel movements like the WSLF (Western Somali Liberation Front), but which also saw extensive use of regular armed forces. This war also brought into play Cold War rivalries, albeit in a singularly baroque way. Until 1974, the United States had supported Ethiopia, whereas the Soviet Union had found a valuable ally in Siyad Barre's military regime, which had come to power in Somalia through a military coup in 1969. Following

the Ethiopian military coup-*cum*-revolution in 1974, however, the new rulers in Addis Ababa, the *Dergue* of Mengistu Haile Mariam, established cordial relations with Moscow. Quite understandably, the USSR preferred an alliance with the much larger Ethiopia than with Somalia and therefore severed the links with the latter and supported the former throughout the Ogadeen War—both directly (mainly by means of arms deliveries and military advisers) and indirectly by supporting the dispatch of Cuban troops to help the *Dergue* despite the rather dubious nature of the latter's Marxist credentials.

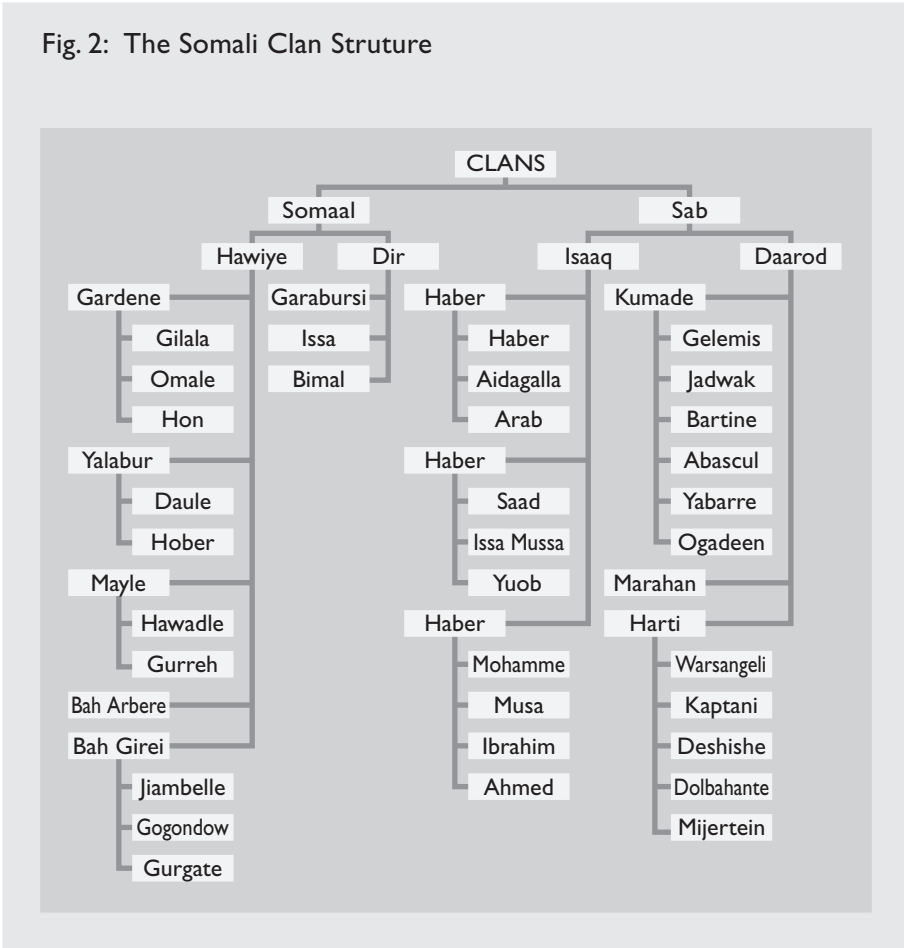
Siyad Barre, in turn, now counted on American assistance, having had his links with Moscow severed, which may be the main reason why he started the war in the first place: that is, he hoped to tempt Washington to support him in exchange for base rights in the former Soviet naval base at Berbera in present-day Somaliland. Unfortunately for him, however, US President Jimmy Carter did not take the bait because of Siyad's abysmal human rights record and Somalia's indisputable status as the aggressor, as well as because the Berbera naval facilities had become less important strategically. Siyad had simply overplayed his hand, as a result of which Somalia effectively lost the war, with quite disastrous consequences for its people.

Not only did the regime now become more despotic, it also became increasingly infected by clanism, notwithstanding its early attempts to ban clanism and tribalism. Now the positions of real power were primarily filled by members of the *Marrehaan*, *Ogaadeen* and *Dulbahante* clans (hence the derogatory term 'MOD rule'), combined with systematic attempts at eliminating the elites of the other clans. A rough outline of the clan structure is provided in Fig. 2.²

The Ogadeen War and its aftermath thus partly explains the rise of nationalist and (when its quest for autonomy proved futile) secessionist movements in what is today (*Isaaq*-dominated) Somaliland, first among which was the Somali National Movement (SNM), which was founded in 1981 and supported by Ethiopia. By 1991 the SNM had established control of its region and proclaimed independence—and Somaliland has remained *de facto* independent ever since. A similar development occurred at about the same time in the *Mijerteen*-dominated north-east, where the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) launched a struggle against the central government, thus laying the foundations for what is today the

² From De Montclos, Marc-Antoine Pérouse: 'Interprétation d'un conflit. Le cas de la Somalie', *Travaux et documents*, no. 70 (Bordeaux: Centre d'étude d'Afrique Noire, 2001), p. 14.

Fig. 2: The Somali Clan Structure



semi-autonomous region of Puntland. A number of opposition movements also sprang up in the southern parts of the country which finally managed to overthrow Siyad Barre in 1991.

The so-called Manifesto Group then set up an interim government with Ali Mahdi Mohamed as interim president, but this was almost immediately followed by a split both between and within the various rebel groups. The main protagonists were General Aideed and his *Habr Abgal* clan and the self-appointed president and his *Abgal* clan. The two groups effectively established control over the southern and northern parts of the capital respectively, divided by a so-called ‘green line’. What followed was an extraordinarily messy civil war, featuring extensive inter-clan fighting and sheer

banditry, combined with widespread looting, which also exacted a toll on the food and other aid provided by the relief agencies.

By March 1992 the population of Mogadishu had been decimated, at least 300,000 people having died of hunger and related diseases, and the direct death toll from the fighting amounting to around 44,000. The severe famine suffered by the civilian population (also partly caused by a drought) was finally 'discovered' by the international media. This belated media coverage brought the suffering of the civilian population to the attention of the 'international community' with an implicit imperative to act—albeit initially mainly with food aid. Most of this only arrived after the famine had abated, and it may arguably even have exacerbated the problems by contributing to the emerging 'war economy', upon which the militias thrived.

What followed was a singularly ineffective or even counter-productive international intervention, which I shall not discuss in any detail here. Suffice it to say that the first mission, UNOSOM-I (United Nations Operation in Somalia-I) deployed in 1992, was not only delayed, but also given too weak a mandate and quite insufficient resources, even failing in the modest objective of establishing 'humanitarian corridors' and 'zones of peace' where aid might be distributed. Indeed the UN mission may even have exacerbated the situation, as its treatment of the warlords as legitimate interlocutors may have granted them a status they did not deserve. The second mission was effectively a unilateral (but UN-mandated) US intervention called UNITAF (United Task Force Somalia). This overlapped with a second UN mission, UNOSOM-II, which created very unclear chains of command as a consequence. By March 1993, the USA had unilaterally declared war against one of the competing warlords, Mohammed Aideed, thus transforming the mission into a manhunt. This was the context of the infamous *Black Hawk Down* incident (3 October 1993), in which eighteen US troops and between 300 and a thousand Somalis were killed, following which the US began a withdrawal of its forces, which was completed by March 1994. The last peacekeepers had left the country by 1995, leaving behind a country in an even worse shape than when they arrived. This has not been forgotten by the Somalis, most of whom now have a mistrust of both the United Nations and the United States.

Islamism played only a limited role in this first round of the civil war. As mentioned above, the rigid Salafist versions of Islam are generally anathema to the predominantly Sufi Somali, but various Salafist groups sprang up after independence, though without attracting any significant following. One of these was *Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya* (the Somali Islamic Union, with the acronym AIAI), founded in 1984, which did play

a certain role during the civil war, effectively operating as one among several warring factions. It was eventually defeated by other factions enjoying some Ethiopian military assistance. Already at this time, Ethiopia had no qualms about intervening in the domestic struggles of its neighbour, mainly in order to prevent the most anti-Ethiopian factions from winning. *Al Qaeda* (AQ) tried to establish a foothold in Somalia during the civil war, but failed miserably to do so. The operatives dispatched to Somalia by the AQ leadership, and whose correspondence has been published by the Combating Terrorism Center at the US military academy at Westpoint,³ clearly show how difficult an environment the war-torn country represented and how un-receptive most Somalis were at that time to Salafist strands of Islam.

After the departure of the 'peacekeepers' in 1994-95, Somalia was basically left alone without any functioning state, but interestingly not without elements of order. The traditional social structures in Somalia with their customary law (*xeer*) and the clan system with its *diya* (blood money) norms served to contain both feud and criminal violence through a system of mutual deterrence in which the clan elders played a central role in constraining their respective clan members. Various Islamic institutions such as charities were capable of substituting, to some extent, for the non-existent social welfare system, and the many local Islamic *shari'a* courts offered a much needed substitute for the defunct formal judicial system. The legal traditions on which most of these courts rested reflected the dominant varieties of Islam in Somalia, and most of them were fairly liberal and syncretic enough in their general outlook to allow ample space for customary law. Not only did the *shari'a* courts provide some general security and a modicum of rule of law, they also promoted an environment that was more suitable for business, and substantial support for the courts did, in fact, come from the entrepreneurial business community. This order has not been an entirely public good, as most arrangements were local and often clan-based, thereby excluding people living beyond the core area of their respective clan, as well as the small minorities who do not belong to clans. In 1999, the business people in Mogadishu apparently simply bought the services of militamen who had previously been loyal to the various warlord factions and assigned them to the *shari'a* courts instead, thereby transforming them from a force of insecurity into one of law and order. These court militias were quite large, numbering several hundreds, and generally well armed, inter alia with the so-called 'technicals,' i.e. small trucks mounted with machine guns, recoilless rifles or even grenade launchers.

³ See Harmony Project: *Al Qaeda's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa* (Westpoint, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy, 2007).

At its height, the civil war had extremely destructive effects on the economy, as commerce was superseded by looting. However, when the fighting abated somewhat, the economy proved remarkably resilient. Indeed, the argument has even been made that the economy did better without a state than it had done under that of Siyad Barre, with its repressive institutions and misguided economic policies.

Quite a strong case could thus have been made for leaving Somalia alone and allowing it to remain stateless. Not only have the various state-building attempts by external actors, to which we shall now turn, all been singularly unsuccessful, but some of them—perhaps especially the most recent one—may in fact have exacerbated the plight of the Somali population. One reason for this relentless quest for state-building is that the entire international system is constructed around states to such an extent that it cannot handle stateless territories inhabited by people who cannot be classified as citizens of any state. Since 9/11 another reason has come into play, one based almost completely on erroneous assumptions, but which is no less important for all that: the belief that failed states are breeding grounds, favourite hiding places, battlegrounds or transit areas for international terrorists, and that state-building should therefore be an integral part of counter-terrorism. Closer analysis shows there to be absolutely no statistical correlation between state failure and the fostering of terrorism, for which the reader is referred to other works by the present author.⁴

Even though the link between state failure and terrorism is thus demonstrably non-existent, external powers are obviously not motivated by facts as such, but by their beliefs. Hence the concerns over statelessness and the keen interest in somehow rebuilding failed states. More than a dozen such attempts at state reconstruction have been made, but I shall confine myself to discussing two foreign-initiated attempts since the turn of the millennium, both resulting in ineffective and illegitimate ‘quasi-governments.’ In 2000, a conference was held in Arta in Djibouti, out of which sprang a so-called Transitional National Government (TNG) for Somalia. However, its actual control extended to only half of the capital and small enclaves in the interior, and it was not even able to ensure the personal security of its members, several of whom were assassinated. Nevertheless, the TNG achieved recognition by the UN in November 2001, having already been formally recognised by the OAU (Organisation of African Unity) in December 2000, but by neither the USA nor the European Union or its member states.

⁴ Møller, Bjørn: ‘Terror Prevention and Development Aid: What We Know and Don’t Know,’ *DIIS Report*, no. 2007: 3 (Copenhagen: DIIS, 2007), available online at www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/Reports2006/diisreport-2007-3.pdf.

In parallel with the gradual demise of the TNG ran the so-called 'Eldoret process', commencing with a gathering of Somali political leaders in October 2002 in the Kenyan town of Eldoret, under the auspices of the subregional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). A 'draft transitional federal charter' was formally adopted in February 2004, describing a federalist political dispensation. The charter further outlined the 'transitional federal institutions' (TFI), the most important ones being the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). However impressive this may sound, there were two major flaws in the agreement. The first of these was the fact that the parliament empowered to appoint the rest of the TFI was not to be actually elected, but appointed by the various clans. Secondly, the TFG never really governed anything, but remained a 'government without governance', as opposed to the 'governance without government' described above.

Tellingly, the TFG did not find the situation in Somalia safe enough for it to relocate from Kenya to Somalia without foreign protection. Having appealed in vain to both the UN and the African Union (AU) for a protection force of 20,000 troops, it eventually settled for Ethiopian armed protection. This allowed it, in January 2006, to move its headquarters to Baidoa in Somalia, whilst still denying that any Ethiopian troops were present. Only after the Ethiopian invasion in late December 2006 was the TFG finally installed in Mogadishu. Following the invasion and the ensuing re-igniting of the civil war, the TFG has become increasingly isolated nationally, notwithstanding its support from abroad. In October 2008, following negotiations in Djibouti, it thus had to undergo yet another transformation to incorporate parts of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS, created in September 2007) into an enlarged TFP and a 'unity' TFG. What would come out of this was still uncertain at the time of writing, but there seemed to be little basis for optimism, as a number of relevant parties had boycotted the Djibouti talks, including some of the former Islamists in the ARS such as the former AIAI leader, Sheikh Aways.

The year 2006 was to become quite dramatic for Somalia, featuring the creation of a counter-terrorism alliance of warlords of dubious repute, the establishment of control over most of the country by the Islamic courts with a somewhat opaque agenda, and an Ethiopian armed intervention of dubious legality. The descent into the abyss seems to have begun with US efforts to enlist support for its war on terror from various Somali warlords, including some who were formally parts of the TFI, but who had broken ranks with TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf, resulting in the formation in February 2006 of an Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism

(ARPCT). The rationale for the Bush Administration's support for the ARPCT was both the assumption that failed states attract terrorists and the belief that some of the accomplices in the August 1998 terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Daar es Salaam were hiding in Somalia.

Like so many other moves in the war on terror, the US creation of the ARPCT seems to have seriously backfired, as it led directly to the formation of a counter-alliance of the various Islamic courts throughout the country (usually referred to as the UIC: Union of Islamic Courts), including their paramilitary forces. They inflicted a decisive defeat on the ARPCT in June 2006, and then proceeded to establish order, managing to disarm most militias in Mogadishu and elsewhere, to dismantle the roadblocks, and to reopen the port and airport, thereby offering a significant improvement in the quality of daily life for the civilian population. As far as the implementation of *shar'ia* was concerned, the UIC sent out mixed messages, as it did with regard to its relations with the TFG. Sometimes UIC spokesmen seemed prepared for some form of compromise and power-sharing, sometimes not—which was also the case for the TFG.

One bone of contention was the foreign (and especially Ethiopian) forces, which the UIC was just as firm in rejecting as the TFG was in insisting on their presence. Indeed, the UIC even proclaimed a defensive *jihad* against what it saw as a clandestine Ethiopian military intervention. Moreover, it also lent some support to both the Ogadeen National Liberation Front (ONLF, consisting of ethnic Somalis) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Ethiopia, just as the UIC forged close relations with Ethiopia's arch-enemy Eritrea. The best explanation of these mixed signals may be that the UIC was a very mixed group without any clear hierarchical structure, comprising both moderates and more radical individuals such as Sheikh Aweys and his even more militant protégé, Aden Hashi Farah, known as 'Ayro.' The latter was also in charge of the *Al-Shaabab* militia and responsible for several rather nasty, terrorist attacks, for example, on the personnel of humanitarian agencies.

In December 2006, Ethiopia launched a major assault on the Islamic courts in the form of a fully-fledged invasion, ostensibly on behalf of the TFG. Given that this was a very uneven battle, it was not particularly surprising that the UIC chose not to fight, but left Mogadishu in order to continue the struggle by other means, either as a guerilla war or in the form of (what is often called) terrorism—including suicide bombings, which had never been used before in Somalia. Fighting continued in the following months and was still continuing at the end of 2008, even though it was unclear whether the main combatants were militant Islamists or merely clan-based

militias. In any case, the response by the Ethiopian forces was very indiscriminate. Hundreds of civilians were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced, especially from the capital. Their opponents also 'fought dirty,' e.g. attacking humanitarian and UN agencies, and using roadside bombs.

Following the withdrawal of the UIC from Mogadishu, the TFG was now, at long last, able to establish its seat of government in the national capital, albeit only thanks to the continued Ethiopian military support. The TFG was somewhat equivocal about its relationship with the remnants of the defeated UIC, some spokespersons expressing the intention of co-opting at least moderate elements into the TFIs, but others taking a less conciliatory position. As so often before, however, the TFG's ability actually to govern the country was extremely limited, partly because it had lost most of whatever legitimacy it might have enjoyed in the first place by aligning itself so closely with what was seen by most Somalis as a hostile invader and occupier.

Since the overthrow of the UIC, things have gone from bad to worse in almost all respects. A humanitarian crisis has developed, the likes of which the troubled country has not experienced since the early 1990s, involving huge numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, mainly in Kenya and Ethiopia. Emergency relief coming in from, among others, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) has been attacked and looted by warlords, ordinary highway robbers and pirates. As a consequence, Somalia has the highest rate of malnutrition in the world, according to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), seventy percent of the population being without access to potable water. A total of 3.2 million, nearly half of the entire population, remained in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator.

The continued struggle for liberation from the Ethiopian occupation has assumed ugly forms such as terrorism—including, for the first time in Somali history, suicide attacks—reflecting a gradual replacement of relatively moderate forces by extremists such as *al-Shabaab* and its leader Ayro until his assassination in a US airstrike with five cruise missiles in May 2008. The counterinsurgency warfare by TFG and Ethiopian troops—to some extent with the African Union peacekeeping force AMISOM (African Union Mission to Somalia) as an accomplice—has remained very brutal and violated many laws of warfare, for instance, by the indiscriminate shelling of residential areas and places like markets. Most TFG troops remain utterly unreliable, and many have deserted shortly after completing their training, taking with them the weapons they had just received. This is probably one of the reasons

why the president has relied extensively on his 'Majerteen militias,' who belong to his own clan and come from his home region of Puntland. Not only have extremist forces come to dominate the armed struggle, but extremism has also found its way into the judicial practice of the Islamic courts themselves, which have begun to apply the most rigorous *hudud* punishments (which were previously extremely rare), such as the stoning of a thirteen-year-old rape victim.

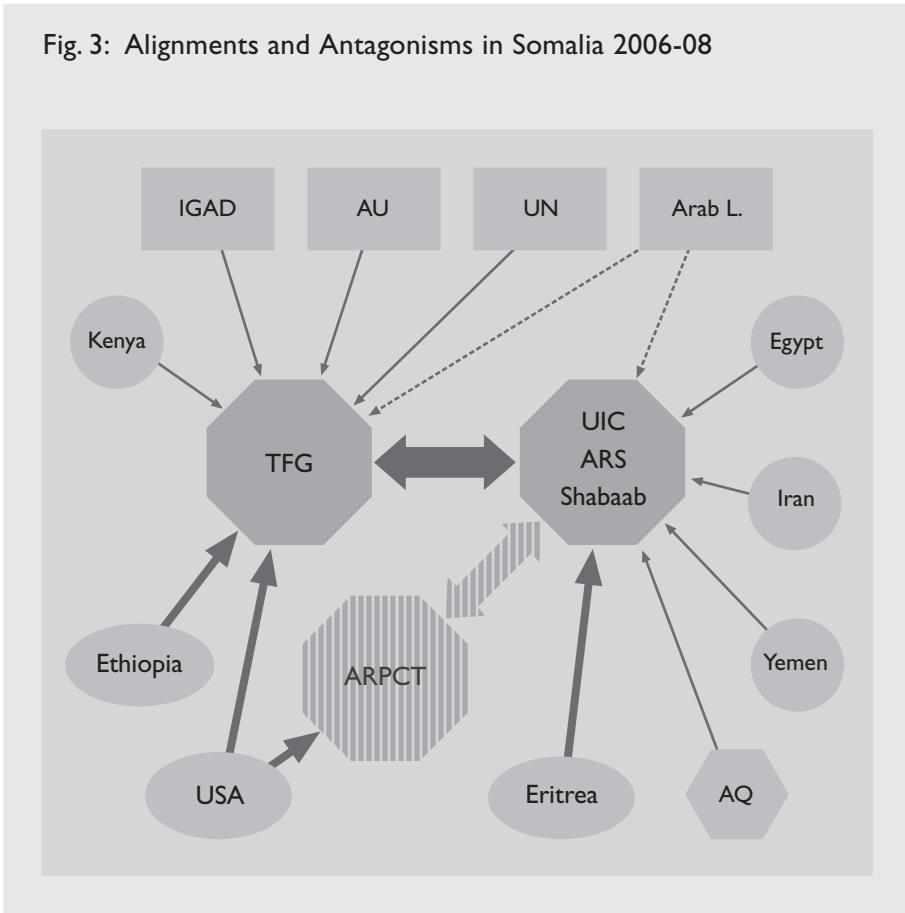
Following the Djibouti 'peace agreement' mentioned above between the TFG and parts of the ARS, Ethiopia finally decided to withdraw its forces by the end of 2008. What they have left behind is, once again, a country in a much worse shape than before their intervention. Regardless of the preparations and mandate for a UN 'peacekeeping' operation, it seems quite unlikely that anybody would want to contribute troops to it—and the same is likely to be the case with the AU, whose AMISOM mission, consisting of Ugandan and Burundian forces, was already, at the end of 2008, stretched well beyond the breaking point and is therefore likely to be withdrawn. Almost inevitably the TFG will collapse completely, and what little it controlled by the end of 2008 will be conquered by the *Shabaab*—perhaps with the exception of Puntland, and almost certainly without Somaliland. On the 29th of December, President Yusuf finally resigned, apparently after some international pressure, and there was speculation that he would now opt for real power in Puntland rather than the entirely fictional power he had exerted over Somalia. Whether the TFG—perhaps even in the expanded 'Djibouti version,' including parts of ARS—will formally remain in existence as a 'quasi-government' until its term formally expires in 2009 is uncertain, but not unlikely, as the international community has a distinct aversion to 'de-recognising' governments.

Whether a Somalia thus left alone by the international community will be able, once again, to recuperate from the ordeal of the last couple of years remains to be seen. Even though the excesses committed by the *Shabaab* and others seem to bode ill for a return to a 'stateless order,' this may still happen. One of the reasons the Islamist insurgents are enjoying rather extensive popular backing is that they are able, partly correctly, to 'frame' their struggle as a national one for liberation from foreign (and Christian) occupation. Once the foreigners have left the country, however, the civilian population must make up its minds whether it really wants to be governed by Islamist and jihadst extremists. Judging by past experience, such a politico-religious ideology does not have any strong appeal for the majority of Somalis, which may mean that the extremists may have to choose between moderating themselves or being overthrown.

2. The Role of External Actors

We are now ready to move to an analysis of the roles and motives of the various actors, the alignments and antagonisms of which are summarised in Figure 3.

The most obvious place to look for relevant external actors is in the immediate neighbourhood of a country, and we do indeed find several states in region that have played a major role in the Somali conflict, just as the subregional organisation, IGAD, has had a significant input. The latter will be dealt with in the section on international organisations (2.2). In this section I shall first look at the subregion and four of its constituent states, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and Djibouti.



2.1 Neighbouring States

Ethiopia has several reasons to take whatever happens in Somalia very seriously. First of all, the two countries were at war with each other in 1978, with Somalia as the aggressor (see above). Even though it strains the imagination to envision a renewed Somali attack in the foreseeable future, as a long-term prospect it is certainly not at all inconceivable. Ethiopian concerns about what a strong Somali state might do are quite understandable, especially considering that the Somali claims to the Ogadeen/Somali Region have never really been abandoned. Secondly, Somalia may foment unrest among the ethnic groups of Ethiopia, especially the Somalis. The present constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), adopted after the fall of the *Dergue* in 1991, grants the various ethnic groups quite extensive rights under the principle of 'ethnic federalism,' including a formal right of secession, but the implementation of these lofty principles leaves a lot to be desired. In fact, the so-called 'Somali Region' (also known as 'Region Five') remains marginalised from Ethiopian politics, and government repression here has been quite severe. There is thus a fertile ground for any Somali attempts to instigate a conflict, the leaders of which might even play the religious card by couching Somali national aspirations in terms of Muslim rights, perhaps even by proclaiming *jihad*, as did the Somali UIC. This not only appealed to the ONLF and the little known United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF), but also to the OLF, which claims to represent the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, the Oromi.

Thirdly, since the two countries are neighbours, any flow of refugees from Somalia will almost inevitably mean an influx into Ethiopia, where such refugees risk upsetting fragile ethnic balances. Fourthly, Ethiopia has been concerned about the extreme lawlessness of Somalia, which does represent a major challenge to the law enforcement institutions of Ethiopia because of the long border between the two countries. Whereas the first two concerns point in the direction of a weak Somali state as Ethiopia's favoured option, the last two point in the diametrically opposite direction, towards a strengthened one. Whereas a strong and hostile Somali state would thus be the worst conceivable option, and a strong and friendly one the preferred one, the government in Addis may have opted for the second-best solution: a weak state which is completely dependent on Ethiopian support.

Addis Ababa was very active in the process which brought the TFG to power and subsequently seems to have influenced the 'election' of its own ally, Abdullahi Yusuf, to power as president. It was also only thanks to the military support Ethiopia gave to the TFG—denied by both sides, but verified by several independent observers—that

the latter was finally willing to leave its offices in Nairobi and relocate to Somalia. It is unclear what role, if any, Ethiopia played in the ill-fated US attempt to establish the ARPCT, which provoked the rise and subsequent victory of the UIC. Following the UIC victory, the government in Addis seems to have attempted to undermine the power of the UIC, probably alarmed not only by the rhetorical support of the latter for the ONLF and the OLF and various overtly irridentist statements by self-proclaimed spokespersons of the UIC, but also by the rise to prominence of Shiekh Aways, a former leader of the AIAI, which probably encouraged an Ethiopian view of the entire organisation as a potential threat.

Hence, the Ethiopian intervention in December 2006 already touched on which ultimately proved profoundly counterproductive. The result has been a relative strengthening of the extremist forces in the Islamist movement, both by allowing militant militias such as the *al-Shabaab* to gain ground and by promoting more Salafist versions of the *shari'a* over the more apolitical and moderate Sufism. One explanation of the latter may be the overlap between the national and the religious causes. As Ethiopia is a historical enemy as well as a predominantly Christian country, it was all too easy for Islamists to portray the intervention as a new crusade by the infidels against the *dar al-Islam*, i.e. the abode of the true faith.

Ethiopia also seems to have been aware all along of its lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the Somali population and was apparently quite eager to withdraw as soon as possible. However, the intervention left it in a *cul de sac* similar to that of the United States in Iraq. Why the government eventually decided to withdraw remains unclear, but the damage done by the intervention is probably irreparable, and Addis's attempts to persuade the AU to take over seem to have failed miserably, as we shall see below.

Neither Eritrea as such nor the incumbent government in Asmara have any real stakes in the Somali conflict, and it thus seems to be the hostile relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia which is driving Eritrean behaviour *vis-à-vis* Somalia. This hostility is something of an enigma in its own right. Eritrea certainly had good reasons to resent its incorporation by Ethiopia in 1962, which abrogated the federation which the UN had enforced in 1952. Hence the long war of liberation lasting until the final overthrow of the *Dergue* in 1991. What is surprising is thus not the general hostility between the two countries, but rather that it has persisted, and even intensified, under the new government in Addis, which was formed of the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) with the TPLF (Tigrayan People's Liberation Front) as its core. Not only had the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) and the

TPLF collaborated closely, but the new president (subsequently prime minister) of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, had also been a close personal comrade-in-arms of the present president of Eritrea, Issayas Afwerky. Moreover, the EPRDF government voluntarily granted Eritrea the independence for which the EPLF had fought for decades.

Even though this amicable relationship gradually deteriorated, it still came as a surprise that an actual war broke out between the two countries in 1998, lasting until 2000, and for no obvious reason, as the Badme plains over which the war was fought were of no intrinsic value. Rather than resuming direct warfare, the two countries seem to have been waging proxy wars against each other ever since 2000, one of the main battlefields being Somalia. As Ethiopia is supporting the TFG, it was thus a foregone conclusion that Eritrea would support the UIC. This is certainly not due to ideological or religious affinity, as the government in Asmara is secular and Christian. Indeed, it is at war with a jihadist movement on its own territory, the Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EJI, sometimes referred to as EJIM: Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement). Nevertheless, Eritrea seems to have provided the remnants of the UIC with both the right to establish base-like facilities on its territory and with arms, the latter in violation of the UN arms embargo.

Even though the entire territory of Djibouti is also encompassed by the irridentist Somali national project, there is no real animosity between the two countries. The small neighbour has on more than one occasion tried to play the role of honest broker and has hosted conferences devoted to Somali state-building and, most recently, to reconciliation between the TFG and those factions of ARS which did not boycott the event, producing the (probably stillborn) Djibouti Agreement of August 2008. The fact that there is a simmering territorial dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea might be thought to make the former lean more towards Ethiopia and, by implication, the TFG, but this does not seem to have been the case.

The role of Sudan also seems to have been quite minor, but on the whole rather constructive and more even-handed than one might have expected from a government based on Islamism. Khartoum has remained neutral throughout the conflict, but played the role as honest broker, for instance, during the stand-off between the TFG and the UIC, when Sudan hosted reconciliation talks between the two sides.

Notwithstanding its recent unrest, ever since independence Kenya has been an anchor of stability in the region. Kenya's role has been less central than one might have expected, considering that a good deal of any refugee flow from Somalia is bound

to end up across their common border—and in view of its historical problems with Somali irredentism and its own alleged ‘Islamist problem.’ Nairobi has generally followed the multilateral track in that it has been working through IGAD. Without really taking a stand on the substance of Somali politics, however, Kenya has also been collaborating closely with the United States by helping to close the border with Somalia and apprehending people suspected by Washington (or Ethiopia) of being aligned with terrorists. Kenya has also been deeply involved in renditions of fleeing Somalis to both Somalia and Ethiopia.

Yemen, on the other side of the Gulf of Aden, has also played a minor role. There is ample evidence that quite a few shipments of arms—to both the TFG and its opponents—have come from Yemen, but no conclusive evidence that this has occurred with the Yemeni government’s approval. The same is the case for the very brutal and cynical human smuggling across the Gulf, which is mainly undertaken by private entrepreneurs located in Yemen. The Yemeni government has collaborated quite closely with the United States in the war on terror, partly because it has itself been exposed to terrorist attacks by local jihadists.

2.2 International Organisations

We have already dealt at some length with the singularly ineffective UN missions to Somalia from 1992 to 1995 (UNOSOM-I and –II), which left the country in a worse shape than when the UN arrived. Ever since then, the UN’s involvement has been low-key, focusing mainly on humanitarian issues, with the organisation’s various subsidiaries and agencies, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the WFP, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), have been the main actors. Many of these had a physical presence in Somalia until 2006 when all international staff were relocated, mostly to Nairobi, because of the intolerable security situation. As a coordinating body, a United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) was established in 1995, headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), and located in Nairobi.

Somalia has also been continuously on the agenda of the UN Security Council (UNSC), mainly because of the sanctions imposed on Somalia by UNSCR 733 of 23 January 1992, which have remained in force ever since, even though their ef-

fectiveness is a matter of some dispute. To oversee this sanctions regime, a Sanctions Committee was established by UNSCR 751 of 24 April 1992. In addition to this committee, the UN also established a Panel of Experts, followed by a Monitoring Group, to prepare comprehensive reports on violations of the sanctions regime. Since 2003 the latter has been producing very detailed and insightful reports on the various breaches of the embargo. It has, for instance, documented extensive violations of the regulations by several states, especially Ethiopia (in support of the TFG) and Eritrea in support of, first, a splinter faction of the TFIs from Mogadishu, and then the UIC. To this should be added the clandestine (and usually denied) support provided by Uganda and Kenya to the TFG and the even more secret support provided to the UIC by Arab countries such as Egypt, Libya and Syria, as well as by Djibouti and Iran, not to mention the assistance provided by *Hezbollah* and even *Al Qaeda*.

Throughout the present crisis, the Secretary-General has presented regular situation reports and the UNSC has passed several resolutions, mainly endorsing the various IGAD and AU initiatives (such as UNSCR 1725 of 6 December 2006) for an international force, while making it clear that this also entails the specification included in the IGAD deployment plan, according to which 'those States that border Somalia would not deploy troops to Somalia.' The Council did, however, amend the embargo to allow for the deployment of AMISOM, and some consideration has also been given to the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation, the requisite strength of which was (very conservatively) estimated at around 20,000 troops, with substantial air and maritime components. No decisions had been taken by the end of 2008, and in light of the departure of the Ethiopian troops and the likely collapse of what little is left of the TFG, it seems highly unlikely that such a force will ever materialise.

In the absence of a UN mission, the African Union has stepped into the breach. Given the attitude of IGAD, to which we shall return shortly, the AU could not easily go against one of the RECs (Regional Economic Communities) designated as its operational arms *in statu nascendi* and as a central component of the African Security Architecture. Moreover, as the OAU had already recognised the TNG, the AU chose to view the TFG as its successor, which made its support for the latter almost preordained. The actual role of the AU was, however, quite modest, mainly because of a lack of armed forces and other resources. In January 2007, the AU's Peace and Security Council mandated a peacekeeping mission (AMISOM) to take over from the Ethiopian forces. Even though it was mandated to comprise 8,000 troops

by the end of 2008, only Uganda and Burundi had actually sent forces, which had come under heavy fire and proved totally incapable of establishing even a modicum of peace in Mogadishu, let alone the rest of the country. The most likely outcome is therefore that the force will soon be withdrawn.

Having served as the ‘midwife’ of the TFG, it is hardly surprising that IGAD has been unswervingly on the side of this so-called ‘government,’ partly because Ethiopia has a large say in the organisation. IGAD was thus, from the very start, highly favourably inclined towards the TFG’s request for armed protection, as well as being in favour of a relaxation of the arms embargo on Somalia in order to allow for a build-up of armed forces loyal to Yusuf and his entourage. Due to the organisation’s weakness, however, its actual role has mainly consisted in putting pressure on the African Union.

The Arab League has only played a minor role as mediator in the crisis, mostly acting in consort with the AU and occasionally the UN. The same has been the case for the European Union, which has generally supported the TFG, albeit with an evidently lukewarm attitude towards President Yusuf. An International Contact Group was established in 2006 comprising the EU, Italy, Kenya, Norway, Sweden, Tanzania, the UK, and the United States, with the AU, IGAD, the League of Arab States, and the UN attending as observers. At its meeting in January 2007, however, it merely took note of the new situation. None of these organisations or groups has had any major role to play, the only exception being the special case of counter-piracy.

2.3 Non-Regional Foreign Powers

Among the non-regional foreign states which – in their individual capacities rather than as participants in multilateral initiatives – play a role in Somalia, only the United States is really of any significance. Unfortunately, however, just as in the early 1990s, the consequences of its various initiatives and activities have been predominantly negative and counterproductive. The main difference between the nineties and recent years seems to be that, whereas the predominant motive then was altruistic and humanitarian, it is now selfish and focused on US national security. Both then and now, however, Washington seems to have accomplished almost the exact opposite of what it was aiming for. In the nineties the result was an exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis, whereas now it is a growth of Islamist militancy and perhaps even of terrorism.

Somalia has been 'securitised' by the US under the heading of the global war on terror, that is, it has been discursively constructed as a threat of 'existential' proportions and considerable urgency, thus warranting a resort to 'extraordinary measures.' What motivated this securitisation was mainly the familiar assumption that failed states somehow foster terrorism, which made the Bush Administration concerned about stateless Somalia and eager to support the TFG. This general assumption has been reinforced by the trust placed in very concrete and intelligence-based (but in quite a few instances simply wrong) pieces of evidence on the whereabouts of various individuals suspected of complicity in the 1998 embassy bombings and/or of planning new terrorist attacks. The equally unfounded equation of Islamism with militancy and jihadism has further produced exaggerated concerns about the AIAI—reinforced by the bureaucratic logic according to which whoever is (rightly or wrongly) included on a terrorist list (as were both AIAI as such and Sheikh Aways) should be treated as a terrorist, regardless of any evidence to the contrary.

Not only has Somalia been securitised as a presumed 'terrorist hotspot,' but the same has happened, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent, to the entire region. This has led to both short-term and military actions such as the air strikes against Somalia and to longer-term diplomatic and institutional region-wide initiatives intended as means to the same end. In the latter category, we might mention the establishment of, first, the East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative (EACTI) and then the Operation Enduring Freedom-Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA), including the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), with headquarters at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti. Its area of operations comprises the territories of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, the Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen, and its mission is described as 'winning hearts and minds.' However, the fact that these task forces have also been involved in military operations (mainly in Somalia) has probably lost more hearts and minds than have been won by other means.

Besides the United States, several individual countries have sent warships to protect their own shipping through Somali waters and the Gulf of Aden, but this only impacts to a very limited extent on the situation in Somalia as such.

2.4 Non-State Actors

If only because of the absence in Somalia of any functioning state to serve as a 'gate-keeper' between the inside and the outside, there are plenty of opportunities for various non-state actors to interfere in domestic affairs in this stateless environment.

During the first civil war in the early nineties, the long period of statelessness and the current humanitarian crisis, there has been an urgent need for assistance to the civilian population of Somalia, which has made both the various humanitarian agencies of the West (besides those affiliated with the UN mentioned above) and the several Islamic charities significant actors. However much such agents strive for strict impartiality, this is often impossible to ensure. First of all, not everybody can be helped all the time, necessitating choices of whom to help and whom not—and the recipient of assistance will usually be able to transform humanitarian assistance somehow into politically or even militarily relevant assets, thereby strengthening themselves relative to their adversaries. Secondly, the very provision of aid usually requires negotiations with armed local actors seeking to ‘tax’ the providers at the expense of the intended recipients and to the benefit of their own armed forces. Moreover, because of the logistical difficulties involved, most aid will usually be provided to those needy groups who are most accessible rather than to those who need it most desperately. Hence, even aid offered for the most unselfish of reasons can occasionally do harm.

Needless to say, these considerations are not intended as a criticism of humanitarian actors, who usually make remarkable and unselfish efforts to help under extremely difficult conditions and at substantial personal risk to their staff. Among the international humanitarian NGOs working in Somalia, one might mention the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins sans Frontières, CARE, CARITAS, OXFAM and Save the Children. Most Islamic relief agencies (e.g. the network of Red Crescent societies) and charities are entirely comparable to the Western, secular or Christian ones, but religiously founded on Islam’s central tenets about alms and *zakat*. There have certainly been attempts at Islamisation and to garner popular support for ‘jihadism’ through various Islamic charities and NGOs, but these have generally been unsuccessful. Some attempts to prevent this under the auspices of the war on terror have failed to distinguish between the few ‘fake’ agencies and the many authentic ones. The ‘collateral damage’ of such attempts is usually very substantial because they almost invariably target groups which are already extremely vulnerable and in desperate need for assistance for their very survival.

Had the Somali flag been designed today, it might have featured a sixth point, symbolising yet another part of the Somali nation—the diaspora, which is scattered across the world. Even though various conflict theories have claimed that the presence of diasporas in rich countries tends to intensify and prolong armed conflicts in the respective countries of origin of these diasporas, the links are probably not nearly as clear as these claims suggest, as there are also instances of diasporas promot-

ing peace. However, it is probably fair to say that large diasporas add an element of unpredictability to armed conflicts, as they represent actors who are both involved in the conflict and detached from its consequences. Modern means of communication allow for a long-distance, but still ‘real-time’ involvement of ‘digital diasporas’ in the affairs of their home countries. It also facilitates the transfer of remittances via modern versions of the old *hawala* system from the Somali diaspora to their kin in the home country, on which the latter often depend for their very survival in an immensely difficult environment.

The war on terror has further complicated matters. Washington thus harbours strong suspicions that at least some members of such diasporas contribute to financing terrorism, either by sending remittances to relatives in Somalia, who may, in turn, support terrorism, or by directly providing funds to *Al Qaeda* and other terrorist groups from the flow of remittances. In November 2001, the USA therefore cracked down on the *Al Barakaat* bank, which was the main medium for the transfer of remittances sent to the Somali civilians. Needless to say, this move did not really improve the already strained relationship between the United States and the suffering civilian population of Somalia, which was in desperate need of these funds. Fortunately, the informal banking sector in Somalia proved resilient and diversified enough to find other avenues for remittance transfers, thereby averting the humanitarian disaster that would otherwise have been inevitable.

It is also entirely conceivable that elements from the routed UIC—perhaps especially the *Al-Shabaab*, rather than AIAI—may join forces with *Al Qaeda*, and that this may be motivated just as much by the ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’ logic than by ideological-religious sympathy or affinity. In its turn, *Al Qaeda* is clearly welcoming the opening up of a new battlefield in Somalia, in addition to those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

3. Conclusion

We can see that the Somali conflict or crisis has been extensively internationalised for decades. The country's neighbours, and not least Ethiopia, have repeatedly meddled in its domestic affairs—as has Somalia for that matter in internal Ethiopian affairs. The same has been the case for extra-regional great powers such as the United States and, until the late 1980s, the Soviet Union, who mainly used Somalia and its regional surroundings as parts of the 'grand chessboard' on which their geopolitical rivalry was played out, with little or no concern for the local implications. The end of the Cold War removed the competitive motive for US interventionism, its place being first (in the early nineties) taken by a humanitarian motive, couched in terms of a 'new world order,' and then after 9/11 by that of counter-terrorism. Even though the former rationale was altruistic and the latter selfish, the consequences were not all that different, both being profoundly counterproductive, and exacerbating, rather than relieving, the plight of the Somali population.

International organisations such as the United Nations, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development have not fared much better. The UN intervention in the early nineties probably made matters worse rather than better, the AU's deployment of a peacekeeping force to Somalia has accomplished nothing at all, and IGAD has not even tried to do anything except helping bring into being a quasi-government (the TFG) which has effectively been a pawn of Ethiopia.

The most effective external actors seem to have been non-state ones such as humanitarian agencies and the Somali diaspora across the world, both of which have, on balance, mitigated the humanitarian catastrophes brought about by the other external actors. Unfortunately, however, there are also other non-state actors of a less benign nature that are having an impact on Somalia, first among them jihadists, some of which may well be linked to *Al Qaeda*.

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